Hamlet

in Contemporary English.

Adapted by
Laurent Paul Sueur.

William Shakespeare.

Hamlet in Contemporary English.
by Laurent Sueur

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CHARACTERS.

Claudius, king of Denmark.
Hamlet, son of the former king, nephew of the current king.
Polonius, Lord Chamberlain of the Household.
Horatio, friend of Hamlet.
Laertes, son of Polonius.
Voltimand, courtier.
Cornelius, courtier.
Rosencrantz, courtier.
Guildenstern, courtier.
Osric, courtier.
A gentleman, courtier.
A priest.
Marcellus, officer.
Bernardo, officer.
Francisco, a soldier
Reynaldo, servant of Polonius.
Actors.
Two clowns, gravediggers.
Fortinbras, prince of Norway.
A captain.
English ambassadors.
Ghost of Hamlet's father.
Gertrude, queen of Denmark and mother of Hamlet.
Ophelia, daughter of Polonius.
Lords, ladies, officers, soldiers, sailors, messengers and other attendants.

ACT I.

Scene I.

Elsinore; a platform in front of the castle. Francisco at his post. Bernardo enters.

Bernardo.
Is there anybody?

Francisco.
Who is coming? Move aside and tell me who you are.

Bernardo.
Long live the King!

Francisco.
Bernardo?

Bernardo.
Yes, it is I.

Francisco.
You are right on time.

Bernardo.
It is midnight. Go to bed, Francisco.

Francisco.
Thank you for not being late:
I am freezing and I feel sad too.

Bernardo.
Was it quiet?

Francisco.

I did not even hear the squeak of a mouse.

Bernardo.
Well, it was a quiet night, indeed.
If you meet Horatio and Marcellus -they stand guard with me- tell them to hurry.

Francisco.
I think I hear them. Stop! Who is there?

Horatio and Marcellus enter.

Horatio.
People who like this country.

Marcellus.
And who are the vassals of
the king of Denmark.

Francisco.
Good night.

Marcellus.
Good night, honest soldier.
Who has relieved you?

Francisco.
Bernardo has taken my place.
Good night.

Francisco exits.

Marcellus.
Good evening, Bernardo.

Bernardo.
By the by, is Horatio here?

Horatio.
In a way!

Bernardo.
Good evening, Horatio; good evening, Marcellus.

Marcellus.
Did the thing appear again tonight?

Bernardo.
I saw nothing.

Marcellus.
Horatio says that it does not exist, for he has not seen it yet, whereas we saw it twice.
Hence, I have asked him to come tonight so that he may see it and speak to it if it appears.

Horatio.
Nonsense! It will not appear.

Bernardo.
Sit down for a while
And let us tell you, once again,
what you don't want to hear:
what we saw last night and the night before last.

Horatio.
All right, let's seat down and listen to Bernardo's story.

Bernardo.
Last night, at one o'clock, when the star that stands at the west of the north star had reached the part of the Milky Way where it is shining now, Marcellus and I...

Marcellus.
Hush! Look: it is here!

A ghost in armour enters.

Bernardo.
It resembles the late King.

Marcellus.
You are an educated man, Horatio; speak to it.

Bernardo.
Horatio, doesn't it look like the deceased?

Horatio.
It does, which fills me with fear and wonder.

Bernardo.
You can speak to it.

Marcellus.
Speak to it, Horatio.

Horatio.
What are you? What is that shadow in armour which resembles the late king of Denmark and strolls the castle so late at night? By Jove, I command you to speak!

Marcellus.
It is offended.

Bernardo.
Look, it is going away!

Horatio.
Stay! Speak, speak! I command you to speak!

The ghost exits.

Marcellus.

It is gone and will not answer.

Bernardo.
What's going on, Horatio? You are trembling and are as
pale as a ghost. Is this thing a mere illusion?
What is your point of view now?

Horatio.
Gosh, if I had not seen it, I would not believe it!

Marcellus.
Doesn't it resemble the King?

Horatio.
Yes, indeed. It is so strange:
it is wearing the armour the King used
when he fought the king of Norway
and it also frowned like the King did when
he had an altercation with some
Poles who were traveling by sled.

Marcellus.
It appeared twice at the same time and went past us
with the same martial gait.

Horatio.
I don't know why, but I feel that
this is a bad omen for our country.

Marcellus.
Well, let's sit down and talk about that matter. Who could
tell me why we must always
keep watch over the country,
why the Danes make so many bronze cannons and import
so many weapons from abroad, and
why the shipbuilders work day and night?
What does this haste mean?

Horatio.
I can tell you that a number of rumors are circulating in
the castle. As you know, the late King,
whose ghost we beheld,
fought Fortinbras, the king of Norway.
In this battle, Hamlet, a valiant man we all admire,
killed him. Hence, the Norwegians were compelled to
surrender a part of their country to Denmark.
If our king had lost, we would have
been compelled to do the same! Now Fortinbras' angry,
resentful son is raising an army composed of hungry
outlaws, who would sell their souls for a piece of bread.
The reason for our anxiety is the
forthcoming war against our neighbors.

Bernardo.
You are right, which explains why this warlike specter
that caused this commotion has come to torment us.

Horatio.
Its presence is upsetting.
At some point during the glorious, tranquil
Roman Empire, a little before
the mighty Julius was murdered,
the graves vomited streams of opalescent corpses that
went down the streets of Rome, vociferating.
The moon, the sun and all the celestial bodies froze.
The motionless empyrean, petrified with fear, had
foreseen the future. It wanted to warn man of his fate.
Hush! It is coming again!

The ghost enters.

I must face it even though it may be dangerous. Stay here,
hallucination! If you can speak, talk to me. If you wish
to do so, I may try to alleviate your torments.
Please, speak to me, especially if you give me any

information about national security.
If you have buried a treasure and don't remember where
it is, you can also tell me about it, of course.

A rooster crows.

Marcellus, it is going away: stop him!

Marcellus.
Do you want me to strike it with my halberd?

Horatio.
Do so if it doesn't stop.

Bernardo.
It is here!

Horatio.
It is here!

Marcellus.
It is gone!

The ghost exits.

It was a bad idea to use violence against this royal
shadow, all the more so because
it is as invulnerable as the air.
Our blows were but stupid gesticulations.

Bernardo.
It was about to speak when the rooster crowed.

Horatio.
Then it took fright like a burglar caught by the sheriff.
It is said that the booming voices of roosters awaken the
god of day and hurry the wandering souls
to their hiding places.

The rumor might turn out to be right.

Marcellus.
It disappeared when the rooster crowed.
Some people say that, on Christmas Eve,
the bird of dawning
sings all night long in order to prevent ghosts from
wandering off. Hence, the heavenly night imposes
serenity on the universe: the bedazzled planets, fairies,
and witches bow to this divine symphony.

Horatio.
I heard this story before and almost believe it.
However, the sun is rising, covering the eastern hill with
its glowing beauty: we should interrupt our watch in
order to go and tell the young Hamlet
what we saw tonight.
I feel certain that the mute spirit will speak to him.
Don't you think that our love and sense of duty should
move us to tell him what happened?

Marcellus.
Let's do it. I know where we will find him this morning.

They exit.

Scene II.

Elsinore. A state room in the castle.
The King, the Queen, Hamlet, Polonius, Laertes, Voltimand,
Cornelius and some Lords enter.

King.
Even though my country and I still mourn my beloved
brother the elder Hamlet, life goes on. Thus I married my
sister-in-law: the faded orange blossoms of grief
coronated the joyful matrimony you wanted.

You all know that Fortinbras underestimates me. Because of the death of my brother, he thinks that our country is in complete disarray. Hence, he keeps asking me to surrender the lands lost by his father. I have written a letter to Fortinbras' uncle, the current king of Norway. This disabled old man almost knows nothing about his nephews' plans. However, I have asked him to forbid his nephew and his army of barefoot rascals to intimidate us. Cornelius, Voltimand, please hand this missive over to the king of Norway. Your haste will show
that you are loyal to your king.

Cornelius and Voltimand.
We will always prove ourselves loyal to our king.

King.
I do believe you; good-bye, gentlemen.

Voltimand and Cornelius exit.

Now, Laertes, what do you want to tell me?
What is your request?
If you ask me a reasonable thing,
you know that I will give it to you.
Your father is a good friend of the kingdom of Denmark:
I would like to please him and you.
What do you want, Laertes?

Laertes.
Your Majesty, I am asking permission to return to France.
I left this country to attend your coronation;
since I have fulfilled my duty,
I wish to leave the kingdom of Denmark.

King.
Does your father agree on that? What his your
point of view, Polonius?

Polonius.
Your Majesty, my son's adamant will has persuaded my heart to grant his request. I would be most grateful if you would allow him to leave.

King.
So, Laertes, you may leave whenever you like. In the meantime, you can do whatever you want.
Now, Hamlet, my nephew and my son...

Hamlet.
Nobody but the king can hear him.
Your son? I will remain your nephew, if you please!

King.
Your sky is always so cloudy.

Hamlet.
Not always: at times the sun illumines my sorrow.

Queen.
My dear Hamlet, take off your mourning clothes so that you may befriend your uncle.
Your veiled pupils must stop searching the woods of sadness for your noble father.
All that lives must die,
pass through nature and reach eternity.

Hamlet.
This is the law of the universe, indeed.

Queen.
You seem upset.

Hamlet.
For I am upset, Mother.
My black coat, heavy sighs and tearful countenance

conceal a bottomless sorrow.

King.
Your good nature moves you to mourn your father.
However, bear in mind that your father lost his father and
that the father of your father lost his father. Each time the
son mourned his father for the appropriate period of
time. If one persists in grieving the deceased,
it becomes a sin.
Stubbornness upsets the Skies, for it betrays a weak
heart, an unbalanced mind.
Since this is the natural order of things,
Why should we take it to heart? You are offending
Heaven, the dead, Nature, and reason. Fathers must die.
Consequently, I am asking you to stop mourning
for your father and start regarding me as your new father,
all the more so because you will become
the king of this country when I die.
By the way, I don't approve of your decision
to go back to school in Wittenberg.
You should stay here, with me: you are the
heir to the Danish throne, aren't you?

Queen.
Hamlet, don't go to Wittenberg.

Hamlet.
Your wish is my command, Mother.

King.
It is a very good answer. So you will stay in Denmark.
Come here, Madam; the proposal Hamlet
willingly accepted suits me.
Every glass of wine I will drink today will thank Heaven
and merrily intoxicate the stars. Let's go.

They exit; Hamlet remains.

Hamlet.
I want my flesh to turn into vapor.
Almighty God, why do you demonize
those who commit suicide?
Life is a winding pathway which leads to nowhere;
it is a weed-infested garden.
I am desperate, and my father has only been dead for two
months; no, not even two months.
He was an excellent king, a giant, compared to my uncle.
He loved my mother so much that he did not allow
the wind to slap her rosy cheeks.
I can't forget those sweet memories.
She venerated him, but, in the blink of an eye, she
married another man! Women's behaviour is so erratic.
Reasonable animals are less forgetful than she is.
Her immoral eyes dried quickly;
they now look at the sheets of incest lustfully.
This wickedness is breaking my speechless heart.

Horatio, Marcellus and Bernardo enter.

Horatio.
Good morning, Your Royal Highness.

Hamlet.
I am glad to see you... Is it you, Horatio?

Horatio.
Yes Sir, it is Horatio, your obedient servant.

Hamlet.
You are my friend, not my servant. What are you doing so
far from Wittenberg?... Marcellus!

Marcellus.
Good morning, Your Royal Highness...

Hamlet.
I am very glad to see you. But why are you here?

Horatio.
We are skipping school.

Hamlet.
Your worst enemy would not dare to say that about you.
Good students don't skip school.
What are you doing here?
I hope we will have a few drinks before you leave.

Horatio.
Sir, I came to attend your father's funeral.

Hamlet.
You must be joking!
You came to attend my mother's wedding.

Horatio.
Subsequently! It came soon after, indeed.

Hamlet.
Meanness, Horatio: the funeral's roasts
became the cold meat of the wedding banquet.
That unforgettable moment was the worst day of my life...
My father… I think that I see my father!

Horatio.
Where, Sir?

Hamlet.
In my mind, Horatio.

Horatio.
I met him once; he was a good king.

Hamlet.
He was a good man. Unfortunately, I won't see him again.

Horatio.
Sir, I think that I saw him last night.

Hamlet.
Whom did you see?

Horatio.
Your father, Sir.

Hamlet.
My father!

Horatio.
Don't get too existed; just listen carefully
to the whole story.

Hamlet.
For God's sake, let me hear it.

Horatio.
For two nights running, around midnight, Marcellus and
Bernardo saw a figure in armour
that looked like your father.
It appeared before them
and walked past them majestically three times.
Shaking with fear, they did not dare to utter a word.
They discretely told me their frightening secret.
So, on the third night, I stood guard with them;
the ghost they had described appeared again:
it was the spitting image of your father,
whom I knew very well.

Hamlet.
Where did this happen?

Marcellus.
On the platform, Sir.

Hamlet.
Did you talk to it?

Horatio.
I did, Sir, but it did not answer.
It raised its head as if it was about to speak, but a rooster started crowing, and the ghost vanished into thin air.

Hamlet.
That's very strange.

Horatio.
Strange but true.
We thought we had to report the incident to you.

Hamlet.
You had to do so, of course… It is upsetting...
Will you stand guard tonight?

Marcellus and Bernardo.
We will, Sir

Hamlet.
In armour, you said?

Both.
In armour, Sir.

Hamlet.
From top to toe?

Both.
Yes Sir, from head to foot.

Hamlet.
Did you see his face?

Horatio.
We did, Sir: his visor was up.

Hamlet.
Did he frown?

Horatio.
No he didn't; he looked rather sad.

Hamlet.
Was his face pale or red?

Horatio.
Very pale.

Hamlet.
Did he stare at you?

Horatio.
Yes, he did.

Hamlet.
I would have done so if I had been there.

Horatio.
You would have been amazed.

Hamlet.
Most certainly. Did he stay a long time?

Horatio.
About a minute and a half.

Marcellus and Bernardo.

Longer, longer.

Horatio.
Not when I saw him.

Hamlet.
Was his beard grey?

Horatio.
Yes it was, just as it was when he was alive:
grayish blond.

Hamlet.
I will join you tonight;
Maybe it will appear again.

Horatio.
I feel certain that it will.

Hamlet.
If the specter resembles my noble father,
I will speak to it, even if Hell opens its gates
to threaten me.
Please, don't tell anybody about this story.
What will happen tonight will also remain secret.
I thank you in advance.
Good-bye, gentlemen.
I will see you on the platform between eleven and twelve.

All.
We are your humble and obedient servants, Sir.

Hamlet.
I appreciate your gratitude. Good-bye.

Horatio, Marcellus and Bernardo exit.

My father's ghost in armour! This is so weird!

It must be a joke. I wish it were eleven o'clock!
Until then, I must remain calm. Malicious people always
try to conceal their bad deeds;
truth always unmask them.

He exits.

Scene III.

A room in Polonius's house. Laertes and Ophelia enter.

Laertes.
My belongings are on the ship.
My dear sister, don't forget to write me letters.

Ophelia.
Do you doubt it?

Laertes.
Don't pay attention to him, Ophelia; Hamlet is trying to
seduce you. His fondness for you is a fleeting passion, it is
a young man's whim: it will last as long as
the twinkling of an eye.

Ophelia.
No more than this?

Laertes.
Just forget him, for when boys become men,
duty overwhelms them.
He genuinely loves you now,
but you must beware of him. He was born a prince,
which diminishes his free will.
Since the nation is contingent on what he does,
his choices must suit the needs
of the inhabitants of his country.
So you can understand that when he says
that he loves you, it is true only

if his subjects allow him to love you.
This uncertainty should compel you
to protect your chastity from his honeyed words.
Restrain your desires, ignore the serpent,
hide your beauty from his lustful eyes.
My dear sister, bear in mind that worms can stain
the virginal beauty of roses before they bloom.
Young hearts burst easily;
they don't even need
malicious people's help to misbehave.
Fear will keep you safe.

Ophelia.
I will take your advice, but, my dear brother,
don't be like those twisted preachers who point out the
pathway to heaven and prefer to walk down the alley of
dalliance, which will surely lead them to Hell.

Laertes.
Don't worry, I won't.
I must leave now… here comes my father.

Polonius enters.

A double blessing is a double benefit.

Polonius.
You are still here, Laertes! Get on board:
The wind is blowing into your ship's sails and they are
waiting for you. Have a nice trip, son!

He lays his hand on Laertes' head.

Don't forget to behave yourself, conceal your thoughts
and ignore people's nasty remarks.
Be approachable, not vulgar.
Hold onto your trustworthy friends;
don't shake hands with every newcomer.

Don’t get into a brawl,
for people will believe that you are a rascal.
Listen rather than talk.
Don’t take your friends’ opinions for granted.
Buy clothes that are neither luxurious nor flashy:
in France, you can judge a man by his cover!
Neither borrow nor lend money, for when you lend money to a friend, you often lose the money and the friend, and when you start borrowing money, you soon become a spendthrift.
Above all, be true to yourself;
this will enable you to be nice to anybody.
Good-bye, son; I feel certain that my blessing will help you understand what I said.

Laertes.
Now I must leave, father.

Polonius.
Go, your servants are waiting for you.

Laertes.
Good-bye, Ophelia; remember what I said to you.

Ophelia.
It is locked away in my mind,
and you will keep the key.

Laertes.
Good-bye.

Laertes exits.

Polonius.
What did he tell you, Ophelia?

Ophelia.
Something about Hamlet.

Polonius.
Well, he had a good idea.
It is said that you have been spending a lot of time
together lately. If the rumor is true, I must tell you that
my daughter or any modest young women
should be more cautious.
What's going on between you two? Tell me the truth.

Ophelia.
Hamlet just showed an interest in me.

Polonius.
Interest! You are talking like an inamorata who does not
want to acknowledge a dangerous situation.
Can you trust his airs and graces?

Ophelia.
I don't know what to think, father.

Polonius.
As for me, I know what to think about you:
you are a naive girl who builds castles in the air.
Respect yourself much more
if you don't want to upset me.

Ophelia.
He is as gentle as a lamb.

Polonius.
Young men are not lambs.

Ophelia.
He swore to God that he loved me.

Polonius.
Trickery! It is grain to trap partridges.
When a young man's blood is on fire,
his tongue swears by all that is holy.

Those flames that give more light than heat
are short-lived.
What resembles true love is a damp squib.
From now on, play hard to get.
Hamlet is freer than you:
temptation keeps making eyes at him.
That is why you must not trust him.
Daughter, he is just trying to seduce you.
So don't talk with him anymore.
Do as I say.

Ophelia.
I will, father.

They exit.

Scene IV.

On the platform. Hamlet, Horatio and Marcellus enter.

Hamlet.
It's freezing cold tonight.

Horatio.
Yes, it's chilly.

Hamlet.
What time is it?

Horatio.
Almost midnight.

Marcellus.
No, I have just heard the clock strike twelve.

Horatio.
Really? I didn't hear it. So the ghost is going to appear.

Trumpets play and cannons are fired.

What does this mean, Sir?

Hamlet.
They are having a party.
The King is giving a toast.
As he drinks his glass of Rhenish wine,
the drums and trumpets congratulate him noisily.

Horatio.
Is it a custom?

Hamlet.
Yes, it is an old custom, not a good one.
Other nations disapprove of our behaviour:
they call us drunkards and denigrate our achievements.
A defect in a man's nature
his reasonable mind cannot restrain
turns his good deeds into unimportant things
and always subject him to public scorn!

Horatio.
Look, Sir, here it comes!

The ghost enters.

Hamlet.
Angels, protect us! Whether you are a good spirit or a malicious demon, whether you bring heavenly scents or hellish sulfur, whether your intentions are good or evil, you look so strange that I am going to talk to you.
I will call you Hamlet the Elder,
Your Majesty, father or King of Denmark.
Answer me! Enlighten me!
Why did your entombed bones
remove their eternal shroud?

Why did the mausoleum where we laid your remains
open its heavy marble jaws to spit them out again?
Why does your armoured corpse come to frighten us
when the moon shivers in the frigid sky?
Tell us why? What do you want from us?
What must we do?

The ghost beckons Hamlet over.

Horatio.
It wants to be alone with you.

Marcellus.
It is politely showing you a place
that is farther away. But don't go.

Horatio.
No, don't go.

Hamlet.
It won't speak; so I will follow it.

Horatio.
Don't, Sir.

Hamlet.
Why not? It is not dangerous.
Besides, my life is not that valuable.
As for my soul, the specter cannot destroy it
since it is immortal!
It is waving at me… I am going to follow it.

Horatio.
It may lead you to the vertiginous cliff;
It may shapeshift and frighten you,
which would turn you into a lunatic.
Beware! Precipices drive people to despair.
When you look at the infuriated waves,

they command you to jump.

Hamlet.
It is still waving at me.
I must follow it.

Marcellus.
Don’t go, Sir.

Marcellus and Horatio try to hold Hamlet back.

Hamlet.
Let go of my harm.

Horatio.
You won’t go anywhere.

Hamlet.
My fate is calling me; it is turning me
into the Nemean lion: I am indestructible!

The ghost beckons him over.

It is calling me. Gentlemen, let me go...

He breaks free of their grasp.

Good heavens! If anyone holds me back, I’ll kill him!
Go ahead, I will follow you.

The ghost and Hamlet exit.

Horatio.
He is going crazy.

Marcellus.
Let's follow him. We mustn't obey him.

Horatio.
What's going to happen?

Marcellus.
I don't know, but one thing is sure:
something is rotten in the Kingdom of Denmark.

Horatio.
Heaven will take care of that.

Marcellus.
No, let's follow him.

They exit.

Scene V.

A more remote part of the castle.
The ghost and Hamlet enter.

Hamlet.
Where are you taking me? Speak! I won't go farther.

Ghost.
Listen to me.

Hamlet.
I will.

Ghost.
Soon I will have to return where my soul
has to burn.

Hamlet.
Poor ghost!

Ghost.
Don't pity me.

Just listen carefully to what I am going to tell you.

Hamlet.
Speak; I am all ears.

Ghost.
You will have to take revenge
once you have heard the truth.

Hamlet.
What do you mean by that?

Ghost.
I am the ghost of your father.
I must haunt this castle at night and, during the day,
wander the burning solitudes of Purgatory
in order to cleanse myself of my past sins.
If they had allowed me to describe my torments,
I would have told you things
that would have pierced your soul,
freeze your young blood, and make your eyes jump
out of their sockets and your hair stand on end.
But mortals mustn't know the secrets of the afterlife.
Listen, Listen! If you ever loved your dear father...

Hamlet.
Oh God!

Ghost.
Avenge this monstrous murder.

Hamlet.
A murder!

Ghost.
Like all murders, it was atrocious. In fact, it was more
atrocious, unusual and unnatural than any other murder.

Hamlet.
Tell me more about it
so that I may avenge your death as soon as possible.

Ghost.
Your eagerness pleases me;
it shows that you are not an indolent weed
carried off by the Lethe.
Now, Hamlet, listen to me.
They said that a poisonous snake bit me
when I was sleeping in the orchard.
This lie fooled everybody in Denmark.
You must know, noble young man, that the snake which
poisoned your father wears his crown now.

Hamlet.
I knew it!
It's my uncle!

Ghost.
Yes, it is that malignant, incestuous beast.
With his twisted mind and ostentatious presents,
he seduced my so-called virtuous wife.
She fell from grace!
She forgot my ethereal love and married a lustful swine.
Virtue cannot succumb to lewdness
even if it hides behind heavenly clothes;
she was not virtuous:
the shameless queen lived with a saint
and ended up marrying a pile of garbage.
I can already smell the morning breeze: I must be brief.
I was sleeping in the orchard, as I used to do in the
afternoon, when your uncle
poured a vial of poison into my ear.
Swift as quicksilver, it passed through the canals of the
body, reached the veins and coagulated the blood.
All of a sudden, my smooth skin cracked.
That's how my brother killed me

and stole my wife and my crown.
He terminated my sinful life
and did not allow me to redeem myself.
Oh, it's horrible, so horrible!
If you are a righteous man, you cannot allow the royal
castle of Denmark to display
the bed of debauchery and incest.
However, don't let your anger invade your mind. Leave
your mother in heaven and let the thorns
sting her heart everlastingly.
Hurry up, son! Avenge your father's death.
Dawn is approaching: I must leave now.
Adieu mon fils [Good-bye, son], and remember me.

The ghost exits.

Hamlet.
Those who are in Heaven, on Earth, and in Hell maybe,
please, hold my heart, and you, my sinews, don't grow old
so that you may continue bearing my weight.
Can I remember you?
My mind is a windy pit.
Will I remember you?
I will try to forget the trivial facts, the past, and
what I read in books to carve your command
on my forgetful marble.
Malicious woman!
Malicious male scoffer!
I now know that men can smile
and be scoundrels at the same time.
At least, this happens in Denmark.

He takes a piece of paper and writes a few lines.

My uncle is a scoundrel.
Now it's time to keep my word.
He said: 'Remember me.' I will.

Horatio and Marcellus are in a neighboring room.

Horatio.
Sir, Sir...

Marcellus.
Your Royal Highness...

Horatio.
Are you all right?

Hamlet.
Yes, I am.

Marcellus.
Ho, ho!

Hamlet.
Come here, boys!

Horatio and Marcellus enter.

Marcellus.
What happened, Sir?

Horatio.
Yes, what happened, Sir?

Hamlet.
It was incredible.

Horatio.
So tell us everything.

Hamlet.
I can’t: you'll disclose the whole story.

Horatio.
I won't, Sir.

Marcellus.
Neither will I, Sir.

Hamlet.
It must remain secret.

Horatio. and Marcellus.
Of course, it must.

Hamlet.
A bad man lives in Denmark.
He is a stupid idiot.

Horatio.
This is a truism.
We don't need a ghost returning from the grave
to tell us that.

Hamlet.
You are absolutely right.
That is why we must shake hands and leave.
You will go to bed; I will go and pray.

Horatio.
Are you trying to fool us?

Hamlet.
Sorry, I didn't mean to offend you.

Horatio.
We don't feel offended, Sir,
we are just curious about the specter.

Hamlet.
I can tell you that it is a real ghost.
Regarding what happened between us,
I won't tell you anything.
Since you are my friends, good soldiers
and persons of quality, could you do me a favor?

Horatio.
What favor, Sir?

Hamlet.
Never disclose what you saw tonight.

Horatio. and Marcellus.
We won't, Sir.

Hamlet.
Fine, but you have to swear an oath.

Horatio.
I swear to God that I won't talk.

Marcellus.
I swear to God that I won't say anything about it.

Hamlet.
Swear on my sword.

Marcellus.
We already swore, Sir

Hamlet.
You did; now swear again on my sword.

Ghost, *under the stage.*
Swear.

Hamlet.
Ha, ha! Is that you? Are you there, my good man?
Come on! You hear this fellow in the cellar.
Swear again.

Horatio.
Tell us what we must say.

Hamlet.
You must say that you will never
reveal what you have seen.

Ghost, *under the stage.*
Swear.

Hamlet.
You are everywhere!
We should move; come here, gentlemen,
and lay your hands on my sword.
Then swear that you will never reveal
what you have heard.

Ghost, *under the stage.*
Swear on his sword.

Hamlet.
Well said, old mole! You work so fast.
He is a good digger, isn't he? Let's move again, my friends.

Horatio.
This is so strange!

Hamlet.
So say hello to this stranger.
There are more things in Heaven and on Earth,
Horatio, than in your shallow imagination.
But, now, listen to me. You will have to forget my past and
forthcoming crazy behavior.

Your arms, your head and your tongue will not betray me.
You will never say ambiguous sentences like: 'We know
that, some people say, it is rumored that, if we were
allowed to.' Swear you won't say that.

Ghost, *under the stage.*
Swear.

Hamlet.
Calm down, perturbed spirit!
Gentlemen, I thank you very much.
Someday I will return the favor.
Let's go back to the castle together.
Don't forget to keep you word.
We live in messy times,
and I was born to fix that!
Follow me, gentlemen.

They exit.

ACT II.

Scene I.

A room in Polonius's house. Polonius and Reynaldo enter.

Polonius.
Give him this money and those letters, Reynaldo.

Reynaldo.
I will, sir.

Polonius.
It would be a good idea, my dear Reynaldo,
to inquire about his behavior
a little before you visit him.

Reynaldo.
Sir, that is what I wanted to do.

Polonius.
Fine. First, find the Danish people who reside in Paris.
Next, find out where they live,
how much money they have
and who their friends are. Don't tell them
that you know my son very well; be evasive:
it will be easier to worm information out of them.
Do you get what I'm saying, Reynaldo?

Reynaldo.
Yes, I do, sir.

Polonius.
Tell them that he is an acquaintance of yours,
that you met in a party, that he is a nice chap and
a funny drunkard, and so on.
You can make up whatever you want,
but don't tarnish his reputation.
Just describe the ordinary vices
of ordinary youngsters.

Reynaldo.
Like gambling, sir?

Polonius.
Yes, gambling, swearing, alcohol, brawls
and prostitutes, even that!

Reynaldo.
Sir, that would certainly tarnish his reputation.

Polonius.
Oh no, not if you embroider the story.
I don't want you to say that he is a womanizer;

just mention a few youthful pranks
in order to lead his friends to believe
that he is a free man, an untamed soul
who lives life to the fullest.

Reynaldo.
But, sir...

Polonius.
How should you proceed?

Reynaldo.
Yes, sir, how should I proceed?

Polonius.
Well, it's easy:
you allude to my son's misdemeanor,
criticize him,
wait for the reaction of his friend,
and, if he has ever seen Laertes do any of these things,
You can feel certain that he will agree with you.
He will even call you 'sir, my man, or my good man',
depending on who he is
and where he comes from.

Reynaldo.
Fine.

Polonius.
And then he will, he will… What was I about to say? Good Lord, I was about to say something. What was I saying?

Reynaldo.
… He will agree with you and call you my good man...

Polonius.
He will agree with you; yes, that's right.
Then he will say: 'I know this gentleman.

I saw him yesterday or the day before last.
He was gambling; he was brawling
because he had lost a tennis match.
I saw him enter a brothel.'
Your lies will enable you to discover the truth.
You must proceed thoughtfully.
This subterfuge will show you
the true nature of my son.
You get my point, don't you?

Reynaldo.
I do, sir.

Polonius.
Good-bye, Reynaldo; and have a nice trip.

Reynaldo.
Thank you, sir.

Polonius.
Don't trust what people say: spy on him!

Reynaldo.
I will, sir.

Polonius.
And let him do what he wants.

Reynaldo.
I will, sir.

Polonius.
Good-bye.

Reynaldo exits; Ophelia enters.

What's the matter, Ophelia?

Ophelia.
Oh, father, I have had quite a scare!

Polonius.
What scared you?

Ophelia.
Father, I was sewing in my bedroom
when Hamlet suddenly came in.
His doublet was open; he did not wear a hat;
his shirt was unbuttoned; his dirty
unfastened stockings were gaping around his ankles.
He was as pale as his shirt
and his knees were knocking together.
He looked like a demon
who would have escaped from Hell.
He came up to me.

Polonius.
Is this love?

Ophelia.
It looks like mad love, indeed.

Polonius.
What did he say?

Ophelia.
He grabbed me by the wrist, held me hard,
then took a step backward and stared at me
like a painter who is examining his model.
He stayed like that for a long time.
Finally, he shook my arm a little, nodded three times
and sighed like a man who is about to die.
Then he let me go, headed towards the door
and found his way without looking,
since he was still staring at me.

Polonius.
Come with me. I must go to tell the King about that.
It resembles rapture.
Love is self-destructive:
it dissolves the will.
All passions vitiate our nature.
I'm so sorry. Did you tell him
anything that might have hurt his feelings lately?

Ophelia.
No, father, but, as you asked me,
I sent his letters back and refused to see him.

Polonius.
He went mad because of that.
I should have examined him more carefully.
I would have never asked you to do what you did.
I thought he was just trying to make a fool of you.
My suspicious nature misled me.
Old people are not always wiser than youngsters!
Anyway, follow me. We must talk with the King,
for we must nip this affair in the bud.

They exit

Scene II.

A room in the castle. The King, the Queen, Rosencrantz, Guildenstern and some attendants enter.

King.
Welcome, dear Rosencrantz and Guildenstern.
I need your help, which is why I have asked you
to come hastily.
You have probably heard about Hamlet's transformation.
I call it transformation because
neither the inside nor the outside looks like
the former Hamlet.

I think that his father's death disturbed him a lot.
Since you both grew up with him
and know him very well,
I entreat you to stay here for a while
so that you may find out
what is the root of his distress.
Then we will try to remedy it.

Queen.
Gentlemen, Hamlet thinks highly of you and trusts you.
If you helped us, you would receive a substantial reward.

Rosencrantz.
The King and you might have ordered us
to carry out your command
instead of begging us to implement it.

Guildenstern.
We will obey you, of course,
for we are you humble and obedient servants.

King.
Thank you very much.

Queen.
Yes, thank you very much.
Please, go to see my poor son right now.
Servants, lead these gentlemen
to the place where Hamlet is.

Guildenstern.
I hope that we will be able to help him.

Queen.
May God bless you!

Rosencrantz, Guildenstern and some attendants exit.
Polonius enters.

Polonius.
The ambassadors are back from Norway, Your Majesty.

King.
You always bring good news, Polonius.

Polonius.
Do I? My soul and sense of duty
belong to God and Your Most Gracious Majesty.
My wide knowledge of politics
leads me to believe that I have discovered
why Hamlet has gone crazy.

King.
Please, tell me why.

Polonius.
I will, but first let the ambassadors speak.
Then I will give you my point of view.

King.
Please, show the ambassadors in.

Polonius exists.

Dear Gertrude, he says that he has found out
the reason for your son's strange behaviour.

Queen.
I suppose that his father's death
and our hasty marriage are the main reason.

King.
Well, we will interrogate him.

Polonius, Voltimand and Cornelius enter.

Welcome, my good friends.
Well, Voltimand, I am waiting for news
of the king of Norway?

Voltimand.
Greetings to Your Majesty.
When we raised the matter,
the King sent messengers there in order to stop
his nephew's war preparation, which were aimed
at defeating the king of Poland.
Then he found out that
the enemy in question was Your Majesty.
He regretted that Fortinbras had taken advantage
of his age and poor health to fool him.
He thus had Fortinbras arrested.
The latter apologized and assured his uncle
that he would never threaten Your Majesty again.
The old king was so happy that he allocated
a three-thousand-crown life annuity to him
and told him that he could cross your country
in order to lead his army to Poland.
In this letter, the King asks you to allow them to
cross Denmark on their way to Poland.

He hands the letter to the King.

The financial and safety issues
are specified in the document.

King.
This is good news. When I have time,
I will read the letter, think about it and answer it.
Thank you for your work. You can take a rest now.
Tonight we will feast to celebrate that.
Welcome back!

Voltimand and Cornelius exit.

Polonius.
All's well that ends well.
However, since I don't have time to handle
the issue with kid gloves,
I regret to inform you that your son is mad.
I say mad, for, when someone is crazy, you
must call him a mad man!

Queen.
Could you be more explicit?

Polonius.
It is true that your son is mad. It is true; it is a pity;
It is a pity it is true. It sounds odd, doesn't it?
Anyway, we must find out the cause of this result,
I should rather say the cause of this defect,
for there is no defect without a cause:
think about it carefully.
I have a daughter, well, until she gets married, of course.
She felt compelled to give me this letter.
Listen to this:
'To an angel, the idol of my soul,
the most beautified Ophelia.'
Beautified: it doesn't mean anything!
Anyway, listen to that:
'In her excellent white bosom.'

Queen.
Did Hamlet write this letter to Ophelia?

Polonius.
Your Majesty, please be patient.
I must read the letter first.
'You may wonder whether the stars burn, whether the
sun moves across the sky, whether the truth lies,
but you cannot question my love.
Oh, dear Ophelia, I am a bad poet and don't
really know how to express my feelings,

but I can assure you that I love you.
My heart will belong to you until it dies.
Hamlet.'
This document is just an example.
My obedient daughter received many other letters and
told me what they contained.

King.
But how did she react?

Polonius.
What do you think of me?

King.
I think highly of you,
for you are a loyal, righteous man.

Polonius.
I am, but what would you have thought of me if
I had remained silent when I discovered this love affair,
which I had noticed before my daughter told me about it?
What would you have thought of me if I had turned a
blind eye to what was happening between them?
Hence, I said to my daughter:
'Since Hamlet is a prince, he will have
to marry a princess. You do not belong to his world.
So you must end this relationship.'
I commanded her to stay away from him
and ignore his letters and cumbersome sighs.
She did what I said.
Then Hamlet became sad, stopped eating,
stopped sleeping, got weak,
became unstable and went crazy.

King *to the Queen*.
Do you think that's why Hamlet is crazy?

Queen.
It may be the reason, indeed.

Polonius.
You know that I always tell the truth.
Do you honestly remember a moment
when I said something that turned out to be false?

King.
I don't.

Polonius *pointing to his head and shoulders.*
Chop my head off if I'm wrong.
I always discover the truth, even when it hides
in the bowels of the earth.

King.
What can we do to find out whether it's true or not?

Polonius.
Sometimes he paces this anteroom
nervously for four hours.

Queen.
Yes, he does.

Polonius *to the King*.
Next time, when he is here,
I will ask my daughter to meet him.
You and I will hide behind the tapestry
and watch what will happen.
If he does not show affection to my daughter,
you will fire me.
I will become a farmer or a carter!

King.
We will try what you are saying.

Queen.
Look at the poor boy; he is coming,
reading a book.

Polonius.
Please, go away.
I am going to talk to him.

The King, the Queen and the attendants exit.
Hamlet enters.

How are you, Your Royal Highness?

Hamlet.
I am fine, thank you.

Polonius.
Do you know me, Sir?

Hamlet.
Of course, I know you: you're a fishmonger.

Polonius.
No, I am not.

Hamlet.
In that case, I wish you were as honest as a fishmonger.

Polonius.
Honest, Sir?

Hamlet.
Yes, sir. Only one man
in ten thousand is honest.

Polonius.
That's true, Sir.

Hamlet.
Since the heat of the sun enables
maggots to proliferate in a dead dog…
By the bye, do you have a daughter?

Polonius.
Yes, I do, Sir.

Hamlet.
So don't allow her to walk in the sun.
Procreation is a good thing, but not the way your
daughter may conceive…
Beware, my good man!

Polonius *to himself.*
What does he mean by that?
He is alluding to my daughter,
but I don't understand what he is saying.
At first, he didn't recognize me. He mistook me for a
fishmonger. He is far gone. When I was young,
I also went crazy because I was in love,
And I was almost as crazy as he is now.

To Hamlet.
What are your reading, Sir?

Hamlet.
Words, words, words.

Polonius.
What is the subject?

Hamlet.
Of what?

Polonius.
Of the book.

Hamlet
It deals with lies, sir. The comedian says that old men have gray beards, wrinkled faces, dirty eyes, and weak thighs, and that they are stupid. This is true, but it's bad manners to write that, for you would
be as old as I if you could
walk backwards like a crab.

Polonius *to himself.*
It's insane, but not completely messy!

To Hamlet.
Will you go out, Sir?

Hamlet.
Into my grave.

Polonius *to himself.*
Well, his grave is outside, of course. His answers are not completely illogical. Sometimes madness can see things that sanity cannot see. I must schedule a meeting between him and my daughter.

To Hamlet.
Sir, I must take leave of you now.

Hamlet.
Take it, but don't take my life, my life, my life.

Polonius.
Good-bye, Sir.

Hamlet *to himself.*
What a boring old fool!

Rosencrantz and Guildenstern enter.

Polonius.
You're looking for His Royal Highness. He is over there.

Rosencrantz *to Polonius*.
Thank you, sir.

Polonius exists.

Guildenstern.
Sir.

Rosencrantz.
Your Royal Highness.

Hamlet.
My good friends! How are you? How are you doing?

Rosencrantz.
We are fine.

Guildenstern.
We are happy, but not that happy,
lucky, but not that lucky.

Hamlet.
Do you feel down?

Rosencrantz.
Not exactly.

Hamlet.
So you're not far from good fortune's breasts!

Guildenstern.
We are close to her, indeed.

Hamlet.
'Breast friends', I suppose!

Anyway, what's new?

Rosencrantz.
Not much: the world is becoming honest.

Hamlet.
In that case, the end of time is approaching.
But you're wrong. Let me ask you a question:
why did good fortune imprison you here?

Guildenstern.
Imprisoned?

Hamlet.
Denmark is a prison.

Rosencrantz.
The world is a prison.

Hamlet.
Yes, a big one, with many cells and dungeons,
Denmark being one of the worst.

Rosencrantz.
We don't think so, Sir.

Hamlet.
This is your point of view, and I don't share it.
To me, Denmark is the worst prison in the world.

Rosencrantz.
Your mind turns it into a prison
because it is a small country.

Hamlet.
No, not at all. I could live in a nutshell and
feel as if I were the king of the universe.

The problem is that I have nightmares.

Guildenstern.
Nightmares are linked to ambition,
for ambition is nothing but the shadow of a dream.

Hamlet.
Yes, shadows are dreams.

Rosencrantz.
Absolutely! In fact, I consider ambition to be the shadow
of a shadow, for it is nonsense.

Hamlet.
I assume that the beggars are the bodies and that the
ambitious kings and heroes are the shadows of those
bodies. What I am saying is not that clear!
Don't you want to go inside the castle?

Rosencrantz and Guildenstern.
We are your humble and obedient servants, Sir.

Hamlet.
I will never regard you as my servants, for, to be frank,
my servants are incompetent people.
So, my friends, what are you doing at Elsinore?

Rosencrantz.
We are here to see you. There is no other reason.

Hamlet.
I thank you even though the thanks of a beggar
like me are not worth much.
Did someone ask you to visit me,
or did you come on your own initiative?
Come on, tell me the truth.

Guildenstern.
What are we supposed to say, Sir?

Hamlet.
Nothing but the truth!
It is clear that someone
commanded you to visit me.
I know that the King and Queen sent for you.

Rosencrantz.
What for, Sir?

Hamlet.
That's what I want you to tell me.
Let me remind you of our friendship, our youth spent together, the implications of our everlasting love, and whatever else will compel you to answer me.

Rosencrantz *to Guildenstern*.
What do you think?

Hamlet *to himself*.
Boys, I have my eye on you.

To Guildenstern.
If you love me, you will answer me.

Guildenstern.
Sir, we were sent for.

Hamlet.
In fact, I am going to tell you why you are here. Consequently, you will have neither to speak, nor reveal a secret, nor break your promise. Recently, though I don't know why, I lost my *joie de vivre* and stopped exercising. Now the world looks like a frozen solitude; the sky resembles a putrid cloud.

Man is a masterpiece:
he can think, reason, move swiftly, act like an angel,
and understand the universe like the Creator.
He is the most beautiful creature on Earth,
the king of beasts.
However, neither men nor women interest me.
But you are smiling, so you think they do.

Rosencrantz.
No, I don't.

Hamlet.
So why did you smile?

Rosencrantz.
I was just thinking that if man doesn't interest you, you won't receive the actors we saw on the road. We walked past them a while ago; they are coming to entertain you.

Hamlet.
The actor who plays the part of the king will be welcome. The adventurous knight will have to use his sword and shield; the lover will not have to sigh all the time; the funny man will have to stop laughing at the end of his monologue; the clown will have to tickle people; the leading lady will be allowed to speak freely. If they don't want to act in this fashion, I will put a stop to the play.
Who are they?

Rosencrantz.
Actors who come from the city;
people whom you know and like.

Hamlet.
Why are they touring the country?
They made more money and
got more attention in the city.

Rosencrantz.
I think that things have changed.

Hamlet.
Are they as popular as they used to be
when I lived in the city?
Do they attract huge audiences?

Rosencrantz.
No, not like before.

Hamlet.
How come? Are they becoming bad actors?

Rosencrantz.
No, they are still good actors, but they have to compete with a group of children who yell instead of playing and attract huge audiences. Those child actors are in fashion. They keep mocking the well-established theater companies. Hence, people don't dare to come and see them for fear of being criticized by the playwrights who write for those ragamuffins.

Hamlet.
Children who are actors! Who takes care of them? Who protects them? Will they stop working when they are adults or remain actors, which is probable? Won't they complain, one day, about those who compel them to compete with the people they will become?

Rosencrantz.
There has been much controversy over this issue. The playwrights and adult actors even came to blows.

Hamlet.
You must be joking!

Guildenstern.
I am not joking, sir. There were many arguments.

Hamlet.
What happened then?

Rosencrantz.
The children won; like Hercules,
they accomplished an improbable task.

Hamlet.
It's not that strange. For example, those who made fun of
my uncle when he was not king of Denmark, now pay
twenty, forty, fifty, a hundred ducats
for a miniature portrait of him.
I guess this is human nature.
A philosopher may explain it to us.

The trumpets play and announce the arrival of the actors.

Guildenstern.
Here are the actors.

Hamlet.
Gentlemen, welcome to Elsinore. Let's shake hands.
I don't want people to think that I'd rather
meet them than meet you.
You are very welcome here.
However, I must tell you that my uncle and
my mother are a bit overwhelmed.

Guildenstern.
Why, Sir?

Hamlet.
They think that I am crazy or, at least, half-crazy.

Polonius enters.

Polonius.
Good morning, gentlemen.

Hamlet, *murmuring*.
Guildenstern, Rosencrantz,
this old man is just a big baby.

Rosencrantz, *murmuring.*
They say that old people behave like children sometimes.

Hamlet, *murmuring*.
I bet that he is going to tell me about the actors.

To Polonius.
You're right, sir; it happened on Monday morning.

Polonius.
Sir, I must tell you something.

Hamlet.
Sir, I must tell you something!
In ancient times, Roscius, the Roman actor...

Polonius.
The actors have arrived, Sir.

Hamlet.
This is a lie!

Polonius.
I swear...

Hamlet.
Each actor arrived on his ass...

Polonius.
They are the best actors in the world.

From Seneca's tedious tragedies
to Plautus' light comedies,
they can play anything:
tragedies, comedies, poetical, historical, pastoral,
pastoral and comical, historical and pastoral,
tragical and historical, tragical and comical
and historical and pastoral plays.

Hamlet.
Oh, Jephthah, judge of Israel, what a treasure you had!

Polonius.
What treasure did he have, Sir?

Hamlet, *singing*.
A pretty daughter
whom he loved profoundly.

Polonius *to himself*.
Alluding to my daughter again!

Hamlet.
Am I wrong, old Jephthah?

Polonius.
I am not Jephthah, but I have a daughter
whom I love profoundly

Hamlet.
You don't know the lyrics.

Polonius.
The lyrics?

Hamlet, *singing*.
If God discovered,
and then, you know,
he would, he would...

If you want to know the end, just learn the song!
I must stop now.

Four or five actors enter.

Welcome, welcome, folks.

He turns to one of the actors.
I'm glad to see you.

To all of them.
Welcome, my good friends.

He turns to another actor.
You have grown a beard. Are you going
to challenge me to a duel and conquer Denmark?

He turns to an actor dressed as a woman.
Hello, girl. You have grown as much as the height of a
tankard since I last saw you!
I hope your voice hasn't changed.

To all of them.
So, my good friends, let's get to the point. First, you must
give a speech so that we may ascertain
that you are good actors.

First actor.
What kind of speech, Sir?

Hamlet.
Once you recited a piece of literature.
As far as I know, you declaimed it once, not twice,
for the play was not popular.
It was caviar to the general.
The connoisseurs and I opined that the play
was interesting, well written and witty.
Someone who liked the play
declared that no artifice

spiced up the story or turned the
language into affected jargon.
I liked one passage in particular; it is a
dialogue between Aeneas and Dido
on Priam's murder.
The scene begins with: 'let me see, let me see…
The rugged Pyrrhus, like the Hyrcanian beast...'
No, I am mistaken; it begins with:
'The rugged Pyrrhus, whose coat of arms was as black as
his purpose, resembled the night
when he crouched inside the ominous horse.
He smeared his soiled body with
the blood of fathers, mothers, daughters and sons.
Covered in blood, infuriated, illumined by a glowing
sun that did not dare to face his barbarity,
Pyrrhus' devilish eyes were looking for Priam.'
Do you remember now?

Polonius.
What a good pronunciation!
You are a born tragedian, Sir.

First actor.
Soon he found Priam
who had difficulty repelling the Greeks.
The old sword he could not wield anymore
fell on the ground.
Pyrrhus rushed at him and raised his infuriated arm:
the wind created by his sword made the old man fall.
The senseless city of Ilium,
as if it felt this blow,
collapsed and took fire.
Pyrrhus turned around.
His sword, which was falling on
Priam's white-haired head, stopped.
Pyrrhus stood there, as motionless as
the ugly portrait of a tyrant,
like a thunderstorm that awaits

the right moment to devastate a country.
Then his hatred, wilder than the Cyclops' hammer
that shaped Mars' armour,
moved him to let his sinful sword fall on Priam.
Go away, Lady Luck, impure monster!
All your gods should assemble
in order to deprive her of her power,
break all the bars on her wheel of fortune,
and send it rolling down the hills of Heaven,
as far as Hell.

Polonius.
This is too long.

Hamlet.
The barber will cut your beard and the text later.
Please, continue, sir. when there are no dances or love
scenes, this old man grumbles and falls asleep.
Go on, come to the scene that deals with Hecuba.

First actor.
By Jingo, if someone had seen the veiled queen...

Hamlet.
The veiled queen?

Polonius.
That's good! The veiled queen is good.

First actor.
… run barefoot, threaten the flames with her tears,
a shawl on a head that was surmounted by a crown,
a blanket around her fearful waist,
he would have cursed Lady Luck
for treating her in that way.
If the gods had seen her as she was watching
Pyrrhus assassinate her husband, her cries
would have made the burning eyes of heaven

shed frigid tears unless the gods don't care
about the human race.

Polonius.
Look: he has turned red and he is almost crying.
He should stop.

Hamlet *to the first actor*.
Fine, you will perform the rest of the play later.

To Polonius.
Polonius, give them the best rooms of the castle... Did you hear what I said, Polonius? Be kind to them, for those people are the ears of history: they could speak ill of you, write their caustic remarks down and turn you into a character that would make
the future generations laugh.

Polonius.
Sir, I will give them what they deserve.

Hamlet.
Give them more than that! Don't treat people the way they deserve to be treated. Treat them in accordance with your own sense of honor and dignity.
The less they deserve, the more your generosity is worth.
Lead them to their bedrooms.

Polonius.
Please, follow me.

Hamlet.
Follow him, my friends;
we will watch your play tomorrow.

Polonius and all the actors but the first exit.

Dear friend, could you play *The Murder of Gonzago*?

First actor.
Of course, Sir.

Hamlet.
So you will play it tomorrow night. Besides, if I wrote
between twelve and sixteen lines that would
modify the original text, could you
learn them by heart before tomorrow night?

First actor.
I could, Sir.

Hamlet.
Excellent! Follow this old man and try not to mock him.

The first actor exists.

To Rosencrantz and Guildenstern.
My good friends, I must leave know.
I'll see you tomorrow. Welcome to Elsinore.

Rosencrantz.
Good-bye, Sir.

Rosencrantz and Guildenstern exit.

Hamlet.
Good-bye.
Now I am alone.
I am nothing but a tormented soul fascinated by a
monstrous actor who distorted his feelings, went pale,
wept and yelled because of an illusion: Hecuba.
What is Hecuba to him or he to Hecuba;
why should he cry for her?
What would he do if he were in my situation?
He would flood the stage with his tears, vociferate,

drive the guilty spectators crazy, terrify the innocent
ones, confuse the ignorant ones, and astound everybody.
As for me, I am but a fearful daydreamer
who does not want to avenge his father's death.
Am I a coward? Am I a villain? Is there anyone
out there who will slap me across the face,
pull out my beard, pinch my nose, and call me a liar?
Someone should treat me in that fashion,
for I am just a sissy man.
I should have fed the falcons the heart and liver of the
malicious old-time king. Dirty-minded villain!
Remorseless, treacherous, lecherous, monstrous villain!
Revenge! I am but an ass! My dear father was murdered,
Heaven and Hell urged me to seek revenge, and yet all I
can do is voice my anger like a dog barking
in an empty street.
It is said that, when guilty people who watch a play are
moved by a scene, they often confess
to the crimes they committed.
Murder has no tongue, but it can speak.
I will have these actors perform a play inspired by my
father's death. I will watch my uncle. If he turns pale, I
know what to do. The ghost I saw may be the devil; the
devil can assume a pleasing shape; he could take
advantage of my weakness and sadness and send me to
Hell... I am playing with fire! I hope artistry
will make the King feel guilty.

He exits.

ACT III.

Scene I.

*A room in the castle. The King, the Queen, Polonius,
Ophelia, Rosencrantz and Guildenstern enter.*

King.
Have you discovered why Hamlet has gone crazy?

Rosencrantz.
He admits that he feels confused,
but he has not told us why.

Guildenstern.
He does not want to be interrogated. Each time we talk
about his strange behaviour, he falls silent.

Queen.
Did he treat you well when you saw him?

Rosencrantz.
Yes, he did.

Guildenstern.
But it is clear that he forced himself to be nice to us.

Rosencrantz.
He did not ask questions, but he answered ours willingly.

Queen.
Did you suggest a recreational activity?

Rosencrantz.
Madam, some actors happened to bump into us on the
road. We told Hamlet about them;
he seemed to be very interested.
They are here; I think that they have been told
to give a performance for him tonight

Polonius.
This is true, and he asked me to invite
you to see the play.

King.
I am happy to hear that he is interested in dramatic art.
Gentlemen, you may try to increase even more
this kind of interest.

Rosencrantz.
We will, Your Majesty.

Rosencrantz and Guildenstern exit.

King.
Dear Gertrude, would you mind allowing us
a moment with him on his own.
We have secretly arranged an appointment
that will bring Hamlet and Ophelia together.
Her father and I will hide in the room and observe
Hamlet's behavior in order to determine whether
he suffers from love delusion or not.

Queen.
I am going to retire to my boudoir.
As for you, Ophelia, I hope that your beauty
is the reason for Hamlet's insanity.
I also hope that your virtues will help him
recover his sanity someday.

Ophelia.
I hope so, Your Majesty.

The Queen exists.

Polonius.
Ophelia, come here...

To the King.
Your Majesty, we must hide.

To Ophelia.
Read this Bible so that your loneliness
may look natural: manifestations of religiosity
often conceal bad deeds.

King *to himself.*
That is so true!
His witty remark may ease my guilty conscience.
The made-up face of a prostitute
is like the ugly actions I disguise with honeyed words.
What a heavy burden!

Polonius.
I hear him coming: let's hide, Your Majesty.

The King and Polonius exit. Hamlet enters.

Hamlet.
To be alive or to be dead: that is the question.
Should I stand the outrages of misfortune or face a sea of
troubles and overwhelm them?
To die, to sleep: it is the same thing.
This sleep may end the sufferings engendered by love.
I don't want to be in pain.
To die... to sleep… to sleep! To dream, maybe.
But what kind of everlasting dream would it be?
This question prevents man from taking his own life
and compels him to put up with humiliation:
oppression, scorn, jealousy, the inefficiency of the
legal system, the civil servants' rudeness,
bad people's dishonesty.
Eternal punishment frightens us; our fear
moors us to the earthly torments we know:
the unknown is a hellish thought.
Conscience turns us into cowards;
reflection does not allow us to be bold.
Hence, great actions lose their way

and reach the island of inaction.
Hush! Here comes the beautiful Ophelia.
Pretty lady, when you pray, remember my sins.

Ophelia.
Good evening, Your Royal Highness;
how are you?

Hamlet.
Fine, thank you.

Ophelia.
Sir, I have some objects that I want
to give back to you. Please, take them.

Hamlet.
They don't belong to me.

Ophelia.
They do belong to you; you even wrote
letters that went with them. They were so well written
that they rendered your gifts more enticing.
Since the thrill is gone, you must take them back.
Righteous people never keep presents
offered by malicious people.

Hamlet.
Are you that honest?

Ophelia.
I beg your pardon?

Hamlet.
And are you pretty?

Ophelia.
What do you mean?

Hamlet.
If you were honest and pretty, your honesty would not converse with your beauty.

Ophelia.
Honesty always converses with beauty.

Hamlet.
That's true. Beauty can vitiate virtue,
but virtue can't make beauty virtuous.
I have just solved this paradox!
You know, Ophelia, I loved you.

Ophelia.
You made me believe you did, Sir.

Hamlet.
You shouldn't have believed me, for virtue
cannot turn human nature into gold.
I didn't love you!

Ophelia.
You deceived me.

Hamlet.
You should become a nun.
You must not give birth to sinners.
Even though I am quite honest, the Queen should have never mothered me, for I am a sinner:
I am arrogant, vengeful, ambitious and malicious.
Why should people like me exist?
Men are rascals. Don't believe them.
Lock yourself away in a convent.
Where is your father?

Ophelia.
At home, Sir.

Hamlet.
Don't open the doors; don't let the fool escape!
Good-bye, Ophelia.

Ophelia.
Dear God, help him!

Hamlet.
If you marry, I will cast a spell on you.
You will be as pure as the driven snow,
but you will have a bad reputation.
Find a convent. Good-bye.
However, you will marry a fool, since wise men
know that women always turn them into monsters.
Find a convent at once. Good-bye

Ophelia.
Dear God, bring him to his senses!

Hamlet.
I have heard of women's craftiness.
God gave you a face you immediately masked.
You simper, prance and twitter, you nickname God's
creatures and dare to tell men
that you are decent women.
I won't stand your behaviour anymore,
for it is driving me crazy.
That is why I forbid marriage.
Whoever is already married, except one person,
will remain married.
The others will have to stay single.
Cloister yourself as soon as possible.

He exits.

Ophelia.
A noble mind expired!
He was sharp-eyed, witty and combative.

The heir to the throne was admired
and imitated by the inhabitants of the country.
Now he is the shadow of his former self.
The venomous lady who enjoyed hearing
his beguiling prayers
is listening to the ravings of a madman.
Woe is me:
the man I met became a ghost.

The King and Polonius enter.

King.
Hamlet did not love you. As for his reasoning,
it was a bit messy, but it wasn't insane.
His melancholy hides something
that may be dangerous.
Hence, for our own safety, I have decided
to send him to England to collect
the money the English owe us.
I hope that the journey and a new country
will destroy the vices that beat in his heart
and dissolve his brain.
What do you think of this plan?

Polonius.
It will work. However, I believe that
his melancholy was caused by lovesickness...
Hello, Ophelia.
You don't have to tell us what Hamlet said,
for we heard everything...
Your Majesty, do as you like,
but it would be a good idea
to let his mother speak to him after the play:
he may confide in her.
I would hide myself to spy on them.
If she did not find out his secret,
you would send him to England
or wherever you want.

King.
It is a very good idea: we will do that.
When important people go crazy,
you have to watch them closely.

They exit.

Scene II.

A hall in the Castle. Hamlet and some actors enter.

Hamlet.
Say the text as I showed you: don't declaim,
don't yell like a town crier and don't overact.
Express the feelings of the character smoothly.
I hate hams: they deafen the audience because
they want to impress the people who are
at the end of the hall, although
most of them cannot understand the meaning
of the words and keep making noise.
I would have the actor whipped if he overdid Termagant.
Dramatic art must not be a caricature or reality.

First actor.
I promise you that I won't perform
in that fashion, Sir.

Hamlet.
On the other hand, you mustn't be too shy.
let your discretion guide you.
Just be natural and logical.
Overacting is not good acting.
The aim of dramatic art is to mirror
society's vices and virtues.
If you overact, ignorant people will laugh,

which will upset the connoisseurs.
Do you think that the censorship exercised by the rabble
must take precedence over the greetings
of the people who have good taste?
I've seen actors, famous ones,
who can't even talk or walk like human beings.
Actually, they ape humanity!

First actor.
Sir, I hope that the members
of our theater company
do not perform in this fashion anymore.

Hamlet.
Make sure that they do not perform in
this fashion anymore and that the clowns
stick to the story.
I don't want them to laugh or
make stupid spectator laugh
while an important issue
needs to be addressed in the play.
This is bad behavior and pathetic.
Go and get dressed.

The actors exit. Polonius, Rosencrantz,
and Guildenstern enter.

Sir, will the King be attending the play?

Polonius.
Yes, the King and the Queen will.

Hamlet.
Tell the actors to hurry.

Polonius exists.
To Rosencrantz and Guildenstern.

Will you help them to get dressed?

Rosencrantz and Guildenstern.
We will, Sir.

Rosencrantz and Guildenstern exit.

Hamlet.
Good evening, Horatio.

Horatio enters.

Horatio.
Good evening, Sir.

Hamlet.
Horatio, you are the best man I have ever known.

Horatio.
Oh, Sir...

Hamlet.
I am not flattering you. It would be stupid
since you don't own anything but your positive attitude.
Why would anyone flatter a poor person?
You just flatter rich people.
If we have been friends since childhood
it's because you take things as they come.
Blessed are the reasonable people
who can tame their instincts and oppose Lady Luck.
If you show me a man like that, he will also become my
friend. But let's get to the point.
A play will be performed in front of the King tonight.
One of the scenes almost depicts my father's death.

Watch my uncle carefully during that scene.
If he maintains his composure, then the ghost we met is
an ordinary damned soul. I will allow you
to call me a stupid idiot!
Watch him closely. I will watch him closely too.
After the play, we will compare our opinions.

Horatio.
Sir, if he is guilty, he will lose his composure.

Hamlet.
Hush! They are coming. Take a seat.

The trumpets play. The King, the Queen, Polonius, Ophelia, Rosencrantz, Guildenstern and other spectators enter.

King.
How are you, Hamlet?

Hamlet.
Fine. I eat air like chameleons do. In fact,
I am filled with air.
Do you know that capons don't eat air?

King.
I have no idea what you're talking about, Hamlet.
I don't understand the meaning of those words.

Hamlet.
Neither do I.

To Polonius.
Sir, you once said that you acted in a play
when you were a college student. Is it true?

Polonius.
It is true. Some people told me that I was a good actor.

Hamlet.
What role did you play?

Polonius.
I played Julius Caesar. I was killed in the Capitol.
Brutus killed me.

Hamlet.
It is bad to kill a Capitoline brute.
Are the actors ready?

Rosencrantz.
Yes, Sir, they are ready.

Queen.
Come here, my dear Hamlet, sit by me.

Hamlet, *heading towards Ophelia*.
No, thank you, Mother. There is a more
precious jewel over there.

Polonius *to the King*.
Oh, did you notice that?

Hamlet.
Miss, can I lie in your lap?

Ophelia.
No, Sir.

Hamlet.
I mean, lay my head on your lap?

Ophelia.
Yes, you can.

Hamlet.
Do you think that it was a ribald remark?

Ophelia.
I have no opinion on the matter, Sir.

Hamlet.
I'd like to lie between a girl's legs.

Ophelia.
What do you mean, Sir?

Hamlet.
Nothing.

Ophelia.
You are in a good mood tonight, Sir.

Hamlet.
Am I?

Ophelia.
Yes, you are.

Hamlet.
Miss, I am your jester. Men should be happy, as happy as
my mother. Look at her smiling face:
and to think that my father
died only two hours ago!

Ophelia.
No, Sir, he died four months ago.

Hamlet.
As long as that? Well, in that case, I should be
wearing a sable coat, not this ugly black outfit.
Good heavens, he died two months ago and he hasn't
been forgotten yet? It means that a man's memory
can outlive him six months.
But he must build churches in order

to achieve that, or else he will be forgotten,
like the hobby-horse in the song that says:
'Heigh-ho, heigh-ho, the hobby-horse is forgotten.'

The trumpets play. The pantomime show begins.
The king and the queen enter; they embrace. She kneels before him and starts speaking to him. He lifts her up and lays his head on her neck. He lies down on a bank of flowers. He falls asleep; she leaves. A man comes in, takes the crown, kisses it, pours poison in the king's ears and exits. The queen returns and finds the king dead: she start yelling. The poisoner comes back with three men and calms the queen. The dead body is carried away. The poisoner woos the queen with gifts.
She seems hesitant but ends up accepting his advances.
The mime artists exist.

Ophelia.
What does this mean, Sir?

Hamlet.
This is mischief.

Ophelia.
It seems that the pantomime is the summary of the play.

The presenter enters.

Hamlet.
This man is going to tell us everything:
actors are talkative creatures!

Ophelia.
Will he tell us what that show meant?

Hamlet.
Yes, of course, or whatever you will show him.
If you feel free to show up, he will show off.

Ophelia.
You're naughty. I'm going to watch the play.

Presenter.
We beg you to be patient with us
and watch our tragedy.

Hamlet.
Is this a prologue or a ring engraving?

Ophelia.
It is short, indeed.

Hamlet.
As short as a woman's love.

The actors playing the part of the king and the queen enter.

King (actor).
We have been married for thirty years now.

Queen (actress).
I hope that we will keep loving each other for thirty more
years! But you seem sad and sick; there must be
something wrong.
You know that women are fearful lovers.
You also know how much I love you.
Hence, my fear is as deep as my love for you.
When there is a lot of love,
the little doubts turn into big thunderclouds:
when a woman worries about her husband constantly,
you can feel certain that she loves him profoundly.

King (actor).
My darling, I will have to leave you soon,
for my body is growing weak.
You will live in this beautiful world,

revered and loved.
Perhaps you will find another husband...

Queen (actress).
My heart would regard a remarriage as a betrayal.
A Woman usually remarries
when she has killed her first husband.

Hamlet *to himself.*
So true!

Queen (actress).
Women remarry for money, not for love.
I don't want another man to kiss me:
it would be like killing my first husband a second time.

King (actor).
I don't question your sincerity.
However, you could change your mind,
for memories always fade away.
Bliss impels us to make promises;
the end of bliss asks us to forget them.
Grief and joy are doomed to oblivion.
Besides, love is rather temperamental.
When a great man is out of luck,
he loses most of his friends;
When a poor man gets rich,
his archenemies become his friends!
Anyway, willpower and fate don't go well together.
That is why I am telling you that fate
will compel you to remarry.

Queen (actress).
The earth may starve me, the sky may blind me,
grief may exhaust me, hope may betray me,
mankind may imprison me,
joy may abandon me,
and eternal torment may persecute me, but

I swear that I will never become
someone's wife again.

Hamlet *to Ophelia.*
What would happen if she broke her vow?

King (actor).
You made this promise willingly.
My darling, leave me alone for a while.
My mind is tired: I would like to sleep.

He falls asleep.

Queen (actress).
May sleep soothe your mind
and discourage dissension.

She exits.

Hamlet.
Mother, do you like the play?

Queen.
The lady is not cooperative.

Hamlet.
But she will keep her word.

King.
Do you know the plot? Is it offensive?

Hamlet.
Ho, no: they keep joking. It is not offensive at all.

King.
What is the title of the play?

Hamlet.
The Mousetrap. Actually, it deals with

a murder committed in Vienna.
Gonzago is the name of the king;
the name of his wife is Baptista.
You will see them soon.
It is not a masterpiece, but who cares?
You and I are good souls, so it doesn't concern us.
It is clear that bad people won't like it.

Lucianus enters.

This is Lucianus, the king's nephew.

Ophelia.
You are a talented ventriloquist, Sir.

Hamlet.
Yes, I am. I could even speak the lines of your male puppets when they try to seduce you.

Ophelia.
You're funny!

Hamlet.
And I have a sharp tongue too.

Ophelia.
I'd rather say that you have bad manners

Hamlet.
Married men have bad manners...
Murderer: on stage! The makeup
will not render you handsome.
The raven is eager for revenge.

Lucianus.
My mind is Evil, my hand is ready:
it's time to take the poison and act.
Thanks to the night, no one can see me.

The putrid mixture of herbs gathered at night
has been infected thrice by Hecate's witchery.
Magic can steal this man's life immediately.

He pours the poison into the sleeper's ear.

Hamlet.
He poisons the king in his garden
in order to take possession of his estate.
The name of the king is Gonzago. The original story
was written in good Italian. You will soon see
how the murderer wins the heart of Gonzago's wife.

Ophelia.
The King is rising from his chair.

Hamlet.
He is scared of toy guns!

Queen.
Are you all right, Sire?

Polonius.
Stop the play.

King.
Turn on the lights. I need to get some fresh air.

All.
Lights, lights, lights!

Everyone except Hamlet and Horatio exits.

Hamlet.
Let the wounded deer hide and cry
while the unharmed hart plays.
Some must watch, some must sleep:
that's how the world works.

Couldn't I join a theater company?

Horatio.
You could, Sir, and they would even give you
fifty percent of the company.

Hamlet.
No, I would become the sole owner,
for you know, my dear Damon,
that Jupiter was overthrown
and that the new king is a big… peacock.

Horatio.
It doesn't rhyme.

Hamlet.
Horatio, the ghost was right.
Did you see his face?

Horatio.
I did, Sir.

Hamlet.
When the actors were talking about the poison?

Horatio.
Yes, I noticed something.

Hamlet.
Let the musicians come!
The King doesn't like the play:
we like this outcome.
My friends, let the music play!

Rosencrantz and Guildenstern enter.

Guildenstern.
Sir, may I have a word with you?

Hamlet.
Yes, more than a word.

Guildenstern.
The King, Sir...

Hamlet.
The King?

Guildenstern.
He is in his bedroom and feels dizzy.

Hamlet.
Did he drink?

Guildenstern.
No, Sir, he is furious.

Hamlet.
You should tell this to a doctor,
for if I were to treat him, he would get angrier.

Guildenstern.
Sir, try to stick to the topic.

Hamlet.
I am trying.

Guildenstern.
The Queen is very upset; she asked me to go and see you.

Hamlet.
Nice to see you!

Guildenstern.
Nice to see you again. But that's not the point.
Please, concentrate. I must tell you

what your mother wants.
If I don't come back with an answer,
she will ask me to leave Denmark.

Hamlet.
Sir, I cannot.

Guildenstern.
What?

Hamlet.
I cannot concentrate because I am a bit confused,
but I will do my best to answer you and my mother.
So what did she say?

Rosencrantz.
She said that your behavior astonished her.

Hamlet.
I am a wonderful son, for I can astonish my mother.
And what does she want?

Rosencrantz.
She wants to speak with you, in her bedroom,
before you go to bed.

Hamlet.
I must obey: she is my mother.
Is there anything else I can do for you?

Rosencrantz.
Sir, you used to like me.

Hamlet.
My thieving hands swear that I still like you.

Rosencrantz.
Sir, what's wrong with you? You're not doing yourself

any favors by refusing to tell your friend
what is tormenting you.

Hamlet.
I want to be promoted!

Rosencrantz.
Someday you will be promoted.
The King himself declared that you were
the heir to the throne.

Hamlet.
Yes, but as the proverb says: 'While the grass grows...'
That's an outdated proverb.

The musicians enter.

Oh, the recorders! Let me see one.

He takes a recorder; then he turns
to Rosencrantz and Guildenstern.

Why do you want to worm information out of me?

Guildenstern.
I am a bit rude, but I worry about you.

Hamlet.
I don't really understand what you mean.
Will you play this recorder?

Guildenstern.
I can't, Sir.

Hamlet.
Please.

Guildenstern.
Sorry, I can't.

Hamlet.
I'm begging you.

Guildenstern.
I don't know how to play this... thingummy.

Hamlet.
It is as easy as lying. Just put your fingers
and thumb over the holes and blow into it.
It will produce a beautiful music.
Look, the holes are here.

Guildenstern.
I can produce a sound, but I will never play a melody.

Hamlet.
Don't play the innocent with me.
You are saying that you can't play the recorder,
but you keep playing with me.
You know where to put your fingers on me in order to
steal my secret notes and decipher
the score concealed in my brain.
Do you think it is easier to manipulate
me than to manipulate a recorder?
You can blow the instrument,
but the instrument won't speak.

Polonius enters.

God bless you, sir!

Polonius.
Sir, the Queen wants to speak with you right now.

Hamlet.
Do you see the cloud up there that looks like a camel?

Polonius.
Good Lord, it looks like a camel, indeed.

Hamlet.
It resembles a weasel.

Polonius.
It does have a back that resembles a weasel's.

Hamlet.
Or that of a whale.

Polonius.
Or that of a whale.

Hamlet.
I'll go and see my mother soon.

To himself.
They are trying to dupe me! … I will go soon.

Polonius.
I am going to tell her.

Hamlet.
It is easy to say "soon".

Polonius exits.

Leave me alone, my friends.

Rosencrantz, Guildenstern, Horatio and the flautists exit.

This is the moment when witches appear and
when graveyards yawn and vomit pieces of Hell
that contaminate this world.
I could drink hot blood and do bad things
that would frighten the daylight.

But I must see my mother…
Oh, heart, don't lose your nature, don't allow Nero's soul
to penetrate it: let me be violent, not barbaric.
I will look daggers at her, but I will use none of them.
However, whether she likes it or not, I will say the truth.

He exits.

Scene III.

A room in the castle.
The King, Rosencrantz and Guildenstern enter.

King.
I don't like him and fear his madness.
So, pack: I am sending you and him to England.
My kingdom must not endure his growing lunacy.

Guildenstern.
Your Majesty, it's a sacred duty
to protect the people who rely on you.

Rosencrantz.
Ordinary people need to be protected;
important people need more protection,
for everybody's welfare depends on them.
When a king dies, what surrounds him dies too.
When a king expires, all the subjects are affected.

King.
Please, prepare yourself for this journey.
We are going to muzzle the lunatic beast.

Rosencrantz and Guildenstern.
We are going to pack right now.

Rosencrantz and Guildenstern exit. Polonius enters.

Polonius.
Sire, Hamlet is going to his mother's bedroom.
I will hide behind the tapestry to hear what they will say.
I feel certain that she will worm information out of him.
As you said, mothers are not impartial,
which is why I must spy on her.
Goodbye, Sire. I will see you before you go to bed
and will tell you what I will have heard.

King.
Thank you, sir.

Polonius exists.

My putrid crime is going to inconvenience
Earth and Heaven.
It bears the mark of Cain's murder.
I would like to pray, but I can't.
My guilty conscience overwhelms my intention.
Like a person with two opposite things to do at once,
I don't know which one to choose.
What would happen if I killed my brother?
Would Heaven wash my monstrous hand?
Since prayers prevent man from falling
and excuse his sinful behaviour, I am going to pray.
The sin has already been committed:
what kind of prayer should I say?
Should I ask him to forgive me for my horrible murder?
That won't work, since I still profit from that murder:
I possess his crown, his queen, and my bloodied pride.
Can a person be forgiven and keep the fruits of his vices?
In this wicked world, criminals use the money
they stole to bribe the judges.
In Heaven, the Scales of Justice point
at man's immorality adamantly.
What must I do? Must I repent?

My heart is as dark as the heart of Satan;
my soul is plunging into sin.
Help me, angels! Bend, stubborn knees!
I want my iron heart to weep.

He kneels. Hamlet enters.

Hamlet.
I could do it now: he is praying.
I would take revenge; he would go to heaven.
A villain killed my father; his only son
is going to send him to the other world:
isn't it a fair price to pay?
He killed my father in the midst of life while his vices
were blooming, which forbade him to repent.
Only God knows how many sins he must expiate.
Is it a good idea to kill my uncle when he is ready to pass
away because he has confessed to the crime? No, it isn't!
Away, sword; wait for a better moment: when he is
boozing, raving, having incestuous sex, swearing,
gambling, or doing something that cannot
lead him to Heaven.
Then I will trip him and send him to Hell.
My mother is waiting. The King's prayer
is keeping him alive a little longer.

He exits. The King rises to his feet and takes a step forward.

King.
My words fly away, but my thoughts remain on the
ground. Thoughtless words never reach Heaven.

He exits.

Scene IV.

Another room in the castle. The Queen and Polonius enter.

Polonius.
He is coming. Scold him; tell him that his pranks have caused much trouble and that you are upset. I will be here and silent. Please, be blunt with him.

Hamlet.
Mother, mother!

Queen.
I'll do what you say.
Hide yourself: I hear him coming.

Polonius hides behind the tapestry; Hamlet enters.

Hamlet.
Mother, what's the matter?

Queen.
Hamlet, you have offended your father.

Hamlet.
Mother, you have offended my father.

Queen.
Please, stop joking.

Hamlet.
Please, stop criticizing me.

Queen.
What do you mean?

Hamlet.
I mean what I say!

Queen.
Have you forgotten who I am?

Hamlet.
No, I haven't. You are the queen, the wife of the
brother of you late husband, and you are
also my mother, unfortunately.

Queen.
Well, I am going to summon people
with whom you agree to talk.

Hamlet.
No, sit down. I want to tell you a few home truths.

Queen.
And if I don't want to listen to your ravings,
what will you do? Kill me?
Help!

Polonius, *from behind the tapestry.*
Help, help, help!

Hamlet.
What's this? A rat?
Let's kill it.

He runs his sword through the tapestry.

Polonius.
Oh, I have been killed!

He falls and dies.

Queen.
What have you done?

Hamlet.
I don't know; is it the King?

Queen.
Oh, what a senseless, barbaric act!

Hamlet.
A barbaric act! Mother, it is almost as barbaric
as killing a king and marrying his brother.

Queen.
As killing a king!

Hamlet.
That's what I said, Madam.

To the dead body of Polonius.
Farewell, imprudent, inquisitorial idiot.
I thought you were less stupid. It serves you right!
I feel certain that you found out it is
dangerous to be too busy.

To the Queen.
Stop wringing your hands. Sit down and let me wring
your heart, which I will do if it is still gentle and if your
vices have not turned it into an impregnable fortress.

Queen.
What have I done to incur your nasty remarks?

Hamlet.
A deed that blurs modesty, turns virtue into hypocrisy,
soils love's virginal face, and vitiates marriage vows:
something horrible that infuriated Heaven.

Queen.
What is the deed that shocked Christendom?

Hamlet.
Look at those pictures that depict two brothers.

This man was really Olympian. He had the curly hair of
Hyperion, the forehead of Jupiter, the eyes of Mars,
and the ethereal posture of Mercury.
He was the very epitome of manly confidence,
which had been bestowed upon him by the gods.
He was your husband.
Now look at this creature. Here is your current husband:
a disease that killed my father.
Do you have eyes? How could you leave the heights of
Mount Parnassus and moor alongside this wharf?
Do you have eyes? You cannot call this love, for, at your
age, passions obey reason. Besides, no reasonable woman
would prefer Nero to Augustus.
You are not completely crazy, since you can move around.
However, your mind doesn't work well: a lunatic
would have seen the difference between those men.
What devil blindfolded you?
Eyes without feeling, feeling without sight, ears
without hands or eyes, smell without anything else:
one impaired sense cannot make such a mistake.
Oh, shame! Why aren't you blushing?
If evil can manipulate an old woman, let a virtuous young
man be a candle devoured by its own fire.
I have noticed that it's no longer shameful to act
impulsively, since old people burn with desire
and rave like youngsters.

Queen.
Hamlet, stop speaking:
you are compelling my eyes to look at my soul,
which is stained with indelible ink.

Hamlet.
And, every night, you sprawl
on the stinky bed of bloodied lust.

Queen.
Stop vociferating.

Your words are stabbing my ears.

Hamlet.
This man is a murderer and a villain,
a squirt, the worst of kings,
a thief who stole the precious crown of Denmark
and put it in his pocket!

Queen.
Please, stop.

Hamlet.
He is a ragged puppet!

the ghost enters.

Oh, angels, save me and spread your wings over me!
… What can I do for you,
Your Most Gracious Evanescence?

Queen.
The poor boy is completely mad!

Hamlet.
Have you come to scold your tardy son,
whose passions made him forget
his important mission? Tell me!

Ghost.
I've come to remind you of your mission, indeed,
and to whet your appetite for revenge.
But look: your mother is in shock.
Talk to her; help her fighting soul
to overcome her amazement.

Hamlet.
How are you, Madam?

Queen.
How do you feel, Hamlet?
You stare into space and speak to nobody!
Your hair is standing on end.
Your bulging eyes are revealing your innermost fears.
Son, calm down!
What are you staring at?

Hamlet.
At him, at him! He is looking daggers at me.
I feel certain that he could turn the stones into
intelligent creatures.

To the ghost.
Stop staring at me! You are going to make me cry
and I won't be able to kill.

Queen.
To whom are you talking?

Hamlet.
Don't you see anything?

Queen.
Nothing at all, although I can see
all the things that are here.

Hamlet.
Did you hear anything?

Queen.
No, nothing but us.

Hamlet.
Look: it is stealing away!
It is dressed like my father when he was alive.
Look, it is passing through the doorway.

The ghost exits.

Queen.
This is in your brain.
Madness induces hallucinations.

Hamlet.
Madness? I am as sane as you are.
What I said is not crazy.
Put me to the test. I will do what a lunatic cannot do:
rephrase everything.
Mother, for God's sake, don't delude yourself:
you are trying to hide your misdemeanors
behind my alleged madness.
This won't heal your rotting soul.
Confess your sins to Heaven and repent.
This way, you will not go to Hell.
If you indulge your vices,
you will be overwhelmed by them.
Forgive me for being virtuous.
In troubled times, virtue must always
apologize to vice!
Hence, I find it difficult to help bad people.

Queen.
Oh Hamlet, you've broken my heart in two!

Hamlet.
Then throw away the bad half
so that you may live a purer life with the other half.
Good night. Don't sleep with my uncle.
You should, at least, keep up appearances.
Habit is a terrible thing:
It prevents people from perceiving
the wickedness of their acts.
However, it can also be a good thing
since virtuous deeds can become a habit.
Don't have sex tonight;

next time it will be easier to remain abstinent.
Habit can change our nature, diminish
the power of our vices and even destroy them.
Once again, good night, Madam.
When you want to repent, I will apologize to you.

Pointing at Polonius.
I'm sorry about what happened to this man,
but God wanted to punish me and him.
I was cruel because I had to obey Heaven.
This is bad, but it will get worse soon.
Oh, and another thing, Madam.

Queen.
What do you want me to do?

Hamlet.
Let the Evil King lure you into his bed,
pinch your cheek, call you his darling wife,
kiss you passionately,
massage your neck with his lewd fingers,
and make you say that I am faking madness.
It would be a good idea to tell him that,
for a righteous, obedient wife
cannot lie to her husband.
Let the Royal Ape worm information out of you.

Queen.
He will fail, for I am too weak to repeat
what you told me.

Hamlet.
Do you know that I must go to England?

Queen.
I completely forgot. So it has been decided?

Hamlet.
Yes, he signed my passport.
My two schoolmates, whom I trust about
as much as vipers, will accompany me
on my journey to knavery.
It is always amusing to see the firecracker explode
in the hands of the pyrotechnician.
But I will stay behind them and
push them toward the Moon.
It's nice to kill two birds with one stone.

He points at Polonius.
This corpse compels me to hurry.
I am going to put it into the next room.
Mother, have a good night.
This crooked politician is motionless,
quiet and serious now.
Come on, sir, let's get this over with.
Good night, mother.

They exit; Hamlet drags Polonius offstage.

ACT IV.

Scene I.

A room in the castle. The King,
the Queen, Rosencrantz and Guildenstern enter.

King *to the Queen.*
Your sighs are meaningful.
Tell me what you have to tell me.
Where is your son?

Queen *to Rosencrantz and Guildenstern.*
We would like to talk privately.

To the King.
Ah, Sire, I witnessed something horrible tonight!

King.
What did you see? How is Hamlet?

Queen.
He is as mad as the sea and the wind when they fight
together in order to ascertain which one is the wildest.
During an episode of sheer lunacy, he heard something
behind the tapestry, thought that it was a rat,
ran his sword through it and killed a man!

King.
Oh, this is terrible!
It would have happened to me if I had been there.
His liberty is a danger to us: you, me, everybody.
What must I do?
I should have prevented that from happening,
I should have thrown him in jail,
but I couldn't do so, for I loved him.
That's why I kept his disease secret
even though it endangered society.
Where has he gone?

Queen.
To remove the body of the man he killed:
his madness has not completely destroyed his humanity.
He is crying over his crime.

King.
As soon as the sun sets, I will send him to England.
I will, of course, apologize profusely
for his dreadful murder.
Guildenstern!

Rosencrantz and Guildenstern enter again.

My friends, you must ask other people to help you.

Because of his madness, Hamlet killed Polonius
and dragged him out of his mother's bedroom.
Go find him, be nice to him,
and place the corpse in the chapel. Please, hurry.

Rosencrantz and Guildenstern exit.

Gertrude, I am going to summon my wisest friends
in order to tell them what happened
and what we are going to do.
I hope that the gossipy tongues
will not besmirch our reputation.
Let's go: I am bewildered and preoccupied.

They exit.

Scene II.

Another room in the castle. Hamlet enters.

Hamlet.
I have hidden the corpse; nobody will find it.

Gentlemen *from offstage*.
Your Royal Highness, Sir, Hamlet!

Hamlet.
What's that noise? Who is calling me?
Oh, here they come.

Rosencrantz and Guildenstern enter

Rosencrantz.
Sir, what did you do with the corpse?

Hamlet.
I buried it.

Rosencrantz.
Tell us where you buried it
so that we may take it to the chapel.

Hamlet.
Do not believe it.

Rosencrantz.
Believe what?

Hamlet.
That I can take your advice and cannot think on my own.
Besides, a sponge is asking me a question!
What must the son of a king say to a sponge?

Rosencrantz.
Do you think that I am a sponge, Sir?

Hamlet.
Yes, sir, a sponge that soaks up
the King's approval, money and authority.
Officers like that provide the King
with the best service in the end.
He keeps them in his mouth like an ape.
First, he chews them; then he swallows them.
When he needs what you have found out,
he can squeeze you like a sponge,
and you will be dry again.

Rosencrantz.
I don't understand what you are saying, Sir.

Hamlet.
I am glad about that. An idiot
cannot understand stupid words.

Rosencrantz.
Sir, you must tell us where the corpse is
and follow us to the King's apartment.

Hamlet.
The corpse is with the King,
but the King is not with the body.
The King is a thing...

Guildenstern.
A thing, Sir?

Hamlet.
It doesn't matter. Take me to his apartment.
Go hide yourselves, boys!

They exit.

Scene III.

Another room in the Castle.
The King and a few counselors enter.

King.
I have asked people to find him and the corpse.
This lunatic is on the loose: it's a dangerous situation.
However, I can't throw him in jail, for people love him.
They are biased. Their attention is focused
on the criminal, not on the crime.
His journey to England must be regarded
as a deliberate pause:
this serious disease requires aggressive treatment
even though it may fail.

Rosencrantz enters.

So, what happened?

Rosencrantz.
He doesn't want to tell us where the corpse is.

King.
But where is he?

Rosencrantz.
Outside, Sire, under guard; he is waiting for you orders.

King.
Bring him here.

Rosencrantz.
Ho, Guildenstern! Let him in.

Hamlet and Guildenstern enter

King.
Hamlet, where is Polonius?

Hamlet.
Eating.

King.
Eating! Where?

Hamlet.
He is eating nowhere. Actually,
he is being eaten somewhere.
Political worms in Worms are babbling.
Your worm is the king of the Diet.
We fatten many creatures in order to feed ourselves; we
fatten ourselves in order to feed the worms. A fat king
and a skinny beggar are but two dishes on the same table.
Do you agree with me?

King.
I don't.

Hamlet.
A man can fish with a worm that has eaten a king
and eat the fish that has eaten that worm.

King.
What do you mean?

Hamlet.
I don't know! But a king can pass through
the bowels of a beggar.

King.
Where is Polonius?

Hamlet.
In Heaven. Send a messenger. If your messenger can't find
him, you will have to check whether he is in Hell or not.
If you don't find him within the next month,
you will smell him as you go upstairs
and enter the main hall.

King *to some counselors.*
You will find him there.

Hamlet.
He will stay until you arrive.

The counselors exit.

King.
Hamlet, I care for you just as much as
I grieve for Polonius.
For your safety, I must send you
to England right now.
So, get ready to leave. The ship, the wind
and your servants are waiting for you.

Hamlet.
England!

King.
Yes, England.

Hamlet.
Good.

King.
I have a good reason to send you there.

Hamlet.
I am acquainted with an angel who knows it.
I am off to England! Good-bye, dear mother.

King.
Hamlet, I am your father.

Hamlet.
Father, mother: it is the same flesh.
I am off to England!

He exits.

King.
Follow him on foot and get him
to board as quickly as possible.
I want him to leave: I have arranged everything.
Please, hurry.

Rosencrantz and Guildenstern exit.

And you, king of England, once defeated
by the Danish army,
if you love me or fear me, you will not ignore my letters
instructing you to kill Hamlet.

Do it, king of England, for he is a poison
that rages in my blood: you must cure me.
Until I know it has been done, I will never be happy,
no matter how much luck I have.

He exits.

Scene IV.

A plain in Denmark. Fortinbras, a captain
and some soldiers enter.

Fortinbras.
Go, Captain, and give the king of Denmark my regards.
Tell him that Fortinbras asks permission
to cross his country with his army.
You know the meeting place.
If His Majesty wants to make a request,
tell him that I will meet him.

Captain.
I will tell him, Sir.

Fortinbras.
You can go now.

They all exit. Hamlet, Rosencrantz, Guildenstern
and other people enter.

Hamlet.
Sir, whose troops are these?

Captain.
The King of Norway's, Sir.

Hamlet.
What are they doing here?

Captain.
They are heading for Poland.

Hamlet.
Who has command over them, sir?

Captain.
The nephew of the king of Norway: Prince Fortinbras.

Hamlet.
Will he attack the whole country or a frontier?

Captain.
Truth to tell, we are heading towards
a worthless territory.
I wouldn't pay five ducats for the usufruct rights.
Neither the Norwegians nor the Poles
will make more money out of it.

Hamlet.
So the Poles will never defend it.

Captain.
They have already stationed troops there.

Hamlet.
Two thousand men and twenty-thousand ducats
will not settle this pointless matter.
Rich countries at peace tend to become warmongers,
which kills them in the end.
Thank you very much, sir.

Captain.
God-bye, Sir.

The Captain exits.

Rosencrantz.
Will you come now, Sir?

Hamlet.
In a moment. Go ahead of me.

Everyone but Hamlet exits.

Everything I see moves me to avenge myself.
What is a human being who just eats and sleeps? A beast!
God gave us intelligence and reason:
we must therefore use them.
Now, whether it is stupid oblivion or cowardly hesitation
that comes from analyzing the matter in minute detail, I
don't know why I'm still saying to myself: 'Do it!'
I am motivated, determined to act,
strong enough and able to do it.
Unquestionable examples exhort me to behold
this massive army commanded by a delicate
prince filled with divine ambition and
who is about to put himself at risk.
Great causes do not give birth to great men:
Trifles turn dwarfs into giants when honor is at stake.
My father was murdered, my mother is impure,
my mind and blood keep provoking me,
and I still don't do anything.
Meanwhile, to my shame, I am gazing at
twenty thousand men who are heading towards death,
who are marching towards an illusion
fostered by vainglory.
They are going to fight for a tiny piece of land
that is not big enough to bury them all.
From now on I must do my best
to avenge my father's death.

He exits.

Scene V.

Elsinore. A room in the castle. The Queen,
a gentleman and Horatio enter.

Queen.
I won't speak to her.

Gentleman.
The poor girl is distracted and keeps talking.

Queen.
What does she say?

Gentleman.
She talks about her father and says
that there are conspiracies;
she stutters, beats her breast, gets angry over little
things, and questions everything. In fact,
what she says doesn't mean anything.
Hence, people hear the words, try to understand them
and end up jumping to conclusions.
Her winks, nods and gestures seem to convey
a heartbreaking message.

Horatio.
It would be a good idea to speak to her since
twisted people may draw dangerous conclusions.

Queen.
Show her in.

Horatio exits.

Queen *to herself.*
My soul is sick, for sin is always a disease.
I don't know what dreadful thing is going to happen.

Guilty conscience relies on jealousy;
the more it is afraid of growing, the more it grows.

Horatio enters with Ophelia.

Ophelia.
Where is the beautiful queen of Denmark?

Queen.
How are you, Ophelia?

Ophelia; *she sings.*
I can't tell the difference
between true love and insincerity,
for true love is a beggar who wears a cap and sandals
and holds a walking stick in his hand.

Queen.
Why are you singing that song?

Ophelia.
Did you say anything? Please, listen.

She sings.
He is dead and gone, lady,
he is dead and gone.
At his head, there is grass,
at his feet, there is a stone.

Queen.
No, Ophelia...

Ophelia.
Please, listen.

She sings.
His shroud is as white as the driven snow...

The King enters.

Queen.
Sire, look at her.

Ophelia; *she sings.*
The grave is covered with flowers;
my wedding veil is not covered with rice.

King.
How are you, miss?

Ophelia.
I am fine. May God give you what you deserve.
It is said that the baker's daughter is an owl.
Sire, we know what we are but not what we may be.
May God be at your table.

King.
She is talking about her father.

Ophelia.
Don't talk about that.
When they ask you what it means, just say:

She sings.
'Tomorrow is Saint Valentine's Day.
It's early in the morning;
I am the girl who is standing below your window.
I want to be your valentine.
Then he got up, put on his clothes
and opened the door of his bedroom.
The girl entered and soon became a woman.'

King.
Poor dear!

Ophelia.
Hang on a moment, this is the end of the song:

She sings.
'Oh, Jesus! Oh, Saint Charity!
What a shame!
Young men will do this if the opportunity arises.
By Jove, they are to blame.
She said: "Before you got me into your bed,
you promised to marry me."
He answered:
"I would have married you,
If you hadn't gone to bed with me."'

King.
How long has she been like this?

Ophelia.
I hope everything will turn out well. We must be patient,
but I can't help crying when I picture him
being laid in the cold ground.
My brother will hear about that.
So, I thank you for your good advice.
Fetch my coach! Good night, ladies;
good night, sweet ladies; good night, good night.

She exits.

King.
Please, follow her and keep an eye on her.

Horatio exits.

Because of her father's death, she got sad
and then lost her mind.
Oh, Gertrude, when sorrows come,
they don't come one at a time but all at once.

First, her father was murdered, then your son was
deported from Denmark because of
his unacceptable behaviour.
People are spreading rumors about Polonius's death;
he should not have been buried so hastily;
he should have been given a state funeral.
The poor dear has been deprived of her sanity,
without which we are just pictures or animals.
Last but not least, her brother has secretly returned from
France. He keeps listening to gossips
who keep telling lies about his father's death.
I will soon become the murderer!
Oh, dear Gertrude, this is killing me!

A noise offstage.

Queen.
What was that noise?

King.
Where are the Swiss guards? Let them guard the door.

A gentleman enters.

What's the matter?

Gentleman.
Hide yourself, Sire.
Laertes, like the ocean when it floods the shores, is
heading for the castle with a horde of rioters.
They call him 'Sire'.
Forgetting the past, the rules, the laws, and the very
meaning of words, they shout:
'We want Laertes to be king!'
Their caps, hands and tongues acclaim the new king:
they want Laertes to be king!

Queen.
The merry crowd is on the wrong track!

A noise offstage.

King.
They have broken down the doors.

Laertes and rioters enter.

Laertes.
Where is the King? Gentlemen, stay here.

Rioters.
No, let us in.

Laertes.
Please, stay here.

Rioters.
All right, all right.

The rioters exit.

Laertes.
Thank you; guard the door.

To the King.
Oh, you wicked king, give me my father!

Queen.
Calm down, Laertes.

Laertes.
The only calm drop in my blood calls me a coward,
which compels me to avenge myself

King.
Let him approach, Gertrude:
God protects kings from traitors.

Why are you so angry, Laertes?

Laertes.
Where is my father?

King.
He is dead.

Queen.
The King did not kill him.

King.
Let him speak, Gertrude.

Laertes.
Why is he dead?
Nobody will manipulate me!
I don't care about politics, conscience, and damnation.
I want my father's death to be avenged,
whatever happens to me.

King.
Who will stop you?

Laertes.
My will, nothing else.
As for my money, I will manage it so well
that it will enable me to defeat Goliath.

King.
Dear Laertes, will the search for the truth
about your father's death lead you
to denounce your father's friends and enemies?

Laertes.
Only his enemies.

King.
Do you want to know who they are?

Laertes.
I will embrace them lovingly
and feed them my flesh.

King.
You are talking like a good son and a true gentleman.
Now I am going to show you that I am innocent.

Rioters *from offstage.*
Let her in.

Laertes.
What's that noise?

Ophelia enters; her outfit is covered with flowers.

Oh, heat, dry up my brain! Oh, salty tears, burn my eyes!
By heaven, those who turned you into a lunatic
will have to face the consequences.
Oh, rosy rose, dear maiden, kind sister, sweet Ophelia,
can a young woman's mind be
as fragile as an old man's life?
When people love, they always give
a part of themselves to their loved ones.

Ophelia; *she sings*.
They carried his coffin;
Hey non nonny, nonny, hey nonny,
and tears covered his grave.
Good-bye, my love.

Laertes.
If you were sane, I would not avenge myself.

Ophelia.
You must sing: 'A down a-down,
and you call him a-down-a.'
The wheels are turning; the false guard
stole his master's daughter.

Laertes.
This nonsense may be more meaningful than it seems.

Ophelia.
There is rosemary, that's for remembrance. Please,
remember love. There are pansies;
pansy means 'thought' in French.

Laertes.
A mad woman connecting remembrance to thought...

Ophelia *to the Queen*.
Here are columbines and fennel for you.

To the King.
There is rue for you and for me.
We may call it 'herb of grace of Sundays'.
You should wear it differently.
There is a daisy here… I would have liked to give you
some violets, but they all faded when my father died.
They say that he died courageously.

She sings.
For the pretty, sweet Robin is all my joy...

Laertes.
She would almost turn madness, sorrow, wild passions
and Hell itself into pretty things.

Ophelia; *she sings.*
Will he come again?
Will he come again?
No, no, he is dead.

Go to your deathbed.
He will never come again.
His beard was as white as snow;
his hair was blond.
He is gone, he is gone,
and we moan.
God, have mercy on his soul
and on all the Christian souls.
Goodbye… May God be with you.

She exits.

Laertes.
God, do you see this?

King.
Laertes, I sympathize with you.
Choose your wisest friends:
they will listen to both of us
and decide who is right.
If they think that I was directly or indirectly
involved in your father's murder,
I will give you my kingdom, my crown,
my life, and everything I own.
If they think that I am innocent,
you will have to be patient.
However, I will do my best to ease your pain.

Laertes.
All right!
The way he died, his secret funeral,
And the absence of military, formal rites
move me to question the official statement.

King.
You are right to do so.
May the Axe of Justice fall on the murderer's neck.
Please, come with me.

They exit.

Scene VI.

Another room in the castle. Horatio and a servant enter.

Horatio.
Who are the people who want to speak with me?

Servant.
Sailors, sir; they say that they have a letter for you.

Horatio.
Show them in.

The Servant exits.

It must be a letter from Hamlet since
he is the only person I know who lives abroad.

The sailors enter.

First Sailor.
God bless you, sir.

Horatio.
May God bless you too.

First Sailor.
He will, sir, if He agrees. If your name is Horatio,
which I suppose, there is a letter for you.
It's from Prince Hamlet,
the ambassador who went to England.

He hands him a letter.

Horatio; *he reads the letter.*
Dear Horatio,
once you have read this letter, you will have to take those men to the palace, for they have letters for the King.
After two days at sea, a pirate ship armed to the teeth pursued us. We were too slow to escape.
So we had to fight.
I could board their ship, which then disappeared in the distance. Hence, they kidnapped me.
They knew what they did!
They have treated me well since they
want me to do them a favor.
Give the king the letters I've sent
and join me as soon as possible.
I will tell you things that will amaze you.
These men will take you to the place where I am.
Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are
on their way to England.
I have a lot to tell you about them.
Friendly yours. Hamlet.

To the sailors.
Come here. I am going to show you where to deliver these letters as quickly as possible so that you may take me to the place where the sender is.

They exit.

Scene VII.

Another room in the Castle. The King and Laertes enter.

King.
Now you have to acknowledge that I am innocent and that I am your friend since you have heard that the man who killed your father also tried to kill me.

Laertes.

I will do so. But tell me why you didn't take
action against those criminals.

King.
For two reasons.
First the queen, his mother, loves Hamlet.
Since I love her, I cannot displease her.
Secondly, the Danes love him.
Their affections blind them to his faults.
Hence, if I criticized him, they would criticize me.

Laertes.
I lost my noble father; my lovely sister is insane;
I will avenge myself.

King.
Don't worry about that.
You must not think that I am inconsistent.
You will hear more about my plans soon enough.
I loved your father and I love myself,
which will enable you to understand...

A messenger enters.

What is it?

Messenger.
Letters from Hamlet, Your Majesty.
This one is for you, Sire; this one is for the Queen.

King.
From Hamlet! Who delivered them?

Messenger.
Sailors or people who pretend to be sailors.
I didn't see them. Claudio gave them to me;
he got them from the man who delivered them.

King.
Laertes, you must know what they say.
Leave us alone.

The Messenger exits. He reads.

'Your Majesty,
I have reached the shores of Denmark;
I am alone and naked.
Tomorrow I will ask permission
to look into your kingly eyes.
First I will apologize to you. Then I will tell you
why I am back. Hamlet.'
What does this mean? Are the others here too?
Is it a lie?

Laertes.
Do you recognize the handwriting?

King.
It is Hamlet's handwriting and style:
he says that he is naked! Besides, he says that he is alone.
Do you understand the letter?

Laertes.
I am a bit confused, Sire.
But let him come. I will relax if
I tell him a few home truths.

King.
I will do so. Let me tell you what you will do.

Laertes.
You are not going to ask me to forgive him
for the murder!

King.
Of course not!

Since he is in Denmark and cannot
resume his trip,
I am going to trick him into
doing something that will kill him.
It will be so natural that even his mother
will call it an accident.

Laertes.
All right, Sire, I will implement your plan.
However, I want to be the factor that
will put him to death.

King.
You will.
Since you left, people have been talking about you.
It is said that you are a gifted young man
and that Hamlet envy you one of your qualities,
which I personally don't view in a favorable light.

Laertes.
What quality is it, Sire?

King.
A quality that belongs to young people.
Two months ago, I met a gentleman from Normandy.
I have fought the French
and have seen how well they ride,
but this man was an acrobat.
He became one with the horse.
This horseman bedazzled me, indeed.

Laertes.
A man from Normandy?

King.
Yes, a Normand.

Laertes.
It must be Lamond.

King.
Yes, that's his name.

Laertes.
I know him well: he is the most precious stone
of France's bellicose crown.

King.
He spoke about your skill level in fencing
and told me that you are almost unbeatable.
According to him, the best French fencers
are not as quick, strong and accurate as you.
Hamlet was so jealous
that he wanted to ask you to come
in order to take on you.
But, let's get to the point...

Laertes.
Yes, what's the point, Sire?

King.
Laertes, did you love your father?
Or are you like the painting of a sorrow:
a face without a heart?

Laertes.
Why are you asking?

King.
I feel certain that you loved you father,
but time lessens love.
Besides, it turns into something else.
Actually, good things are self-destructive,
all the more so because time that passes

lead us to forget our feelings.
Anyway, Hamlet is coming back.
What will you do to prove
that you are a chip off the old block?

Laertes.
I will cut Hamlet's throat in church.

King.
No place should protect a murderer;
revenge should be boundless.
But, Laertes, will you implement that plan?
Lock yourself up in your bedroom.
When Hamlet comes home,
he will learn that you are here.
Everybody at court will praise you,
which will kindle his warlike instincts.
Hamlet is so careless, generous and naive
that he won't examine the foils.
So you will choose the sharpest one
and, in two shakes of a lamb's tail,
you will avenge your father's death.

Laertes.
I will do it and also oil the foil.
A quack doctor sold me a poison that is so dangerous
that if you dip a knife in it,
no medicine in the world can save the person
who is scratched by it.
Hence, if the foil scratches his skin,
he is likely to die.

King.
Let's think about this
and consider what time
and what method will be more convenient.
Since our plan could fail,
it would be wiser to have a second one.

Let me think…
I know what you will do:
you will exhaust him, which will make him thirsty.
Consequently, he will ask for a drink.
A servant will hand him a glass of... poisoned wine.
If, by chance, he avoids your poisoned sword,
my poisoned wine will kill him.
But wait, what's that noise?

The Queen enters.

Queen.
Bad news keep coming:
Your sister drowned, Laertes.

Laertes.
She drowned! Where?

Queen.
There is a willow tree that leans over a silvery brook
which mirrors its pearly leaves.
Ophelia made wreaths out of buttercups,
stinging nettles, daisies and purple orchids.
Lewd shepherds call them by an obscene name,
whereas pure-minded girls call them 'dead men's fingers.'
She climbed into the tree
to hang her wreaths on the branches.
She and her flowers fell into the weeping brook.
Her clothes spread out in the water,
which buoyed her up for a while.
She was singing old tunes
and did not seem to realize the danger.
Then her clothes,
heavy with the water they had absorbed,
pulled the poor girl out of her song
and drowned her.

Laertes.
So she drowned?

Queen.
Yes, she drowned.

Laertes.
Poor Ophelia, you have had too much water already;
so I should not shed a tear,
but human nature compels men to cry
even though I would prefer not to do so.
Good-bye, Sire.
I should utter fiery words,
but my foolish tears prevent me from speaking.

He exits.

King.
Let's follow him, Gertrude.
I tried to calm him down,
and now I fear that he is getting excited again.
We must follow him.

They exit.

ACT V.

Scene I.

A churchyard. Two clowns with spades enter.

First Clown.
Though she killed herself,
will they hold a Christian funeral?

Second Clown.
Yes, they will. So finish her grave right away.

The coroner examined the case and said
that she died in a Christian way.

First Clown.
I guess that she drowned herself
in order to protect her soul.

Second Clown.
That's what they said.

First Clown.
It sounds more like a suicide.
In fact, she knew that she was drowning herself.
So that's an act. An act has three sides:
to do, to act, and to perform.
So she slipped on one side
and drowned herself wittingly.

Second Clown.
No, listen...

First Clown.
Let me finish.
Here is the water; here is a man.
If the man plunges into the water and drowns himself,
the man is guilty. If the water approaches him
and drowns him, the water is guilty.
Therefore, he who does not kill himself
does not commit suicide.

Second Clown.
But is this written in the Law?

First Clown.
At least, it's written in the coroner's report.

Second Clown.
Do you want to know the truth?

If this woman hadn't been rich,
she wouldn't have been given a Christian burial.

First Clown.
You said it! It's a pity the rich are allowed to hang or
drown themselves while the other Christians aren't.
Come on, spade. The most ancient aristocrats are
gardeners, ditch-diggers and gravediggers:
they ennoble Adam's profession.

Second Clown.
Was he a gentleman?

First Clown.
He was the first man who ever had a coat of arms.

Second Clown.
He did not have any.

First Clown.
Are you a heathen? Do you understand
what is written in the Bible?
It says that Adam dug in the ground.
How could he dig without arms?
I will ask you another question. If you can't answer it...

Second Clown.
Go ahead.

First Clown.
Who is the person who builds stronger things than a
stonemason, a shipbuilder, or a carpenter?

Second Clown.
The man who builds the gallows to hang people on,
for his work outlives a thousand users.

First Clown.
I like this witticism. The gallows does a good job,
but how? It does a good job when it punishes
those who misbehave. Now we cannot say that
the gallows is stronger than a church. If you say so,
you will pay dearly for it. It's your turn!

Second Clown.
… Who builds stronger things than a stonemason,
a shipbuilder, or a carpenter?

First Clown.
To build or not to build: that is the question, indeed!

Second Clown.
I know the answer.

First Clown.
Carry on.

Second Clown.
Damn, I forgot!

Hamlet and Horatio enter in the distance.

First Clown.
Don't cudgel your brains,
for a whipping cannot make a slow donkey go faster.
The next time someone asks you this question,
say 'a gravedigger'; the houses he builds last till Judgment
Day. Now go to Yaughan's inn and get me
a stoupful of firewater.

The Second Clown exits. The First Clown digs and sings.

When I was young, I loved to love.
I thought that work was secondary…

Hamlet.
Doesn't this man realize what he is doing?
He is singing while he is digging a grave!

Horatio.
He has been digging graves for so long
that he does not see them anymore.

Hamlet.
Only people who don't have to work
can afford to be sensitive.

First Clown; *he sings.*
But time passed and grabbed me in its claws;
then it threw me into this hole.

He throws a skull.

Hamlet.
Not so long ago, this skull had a tongue
in his mouth and could sing.
He threw it in the air as if it belonged to Cain,
the first murderer.
It might be the skull of a politician
who did not often go to church.

Horatio.
It might be so, Sir.

Hamlet.
It might be the skull of a ceremonious courtier or
of a grateful lord who used to borrow horses
from another lord.

Horatio.
It might be so, Sir.

Hamlet.
Now it belongs to Lady Worm:
what a reversal of fortune!
Was life worth the pain?
The gravedigger is playing jacks now!
When I think of it, my bones ache.

First Clown; *he sings.*
A pickax, a spade, a spade,
and a marble shroud.
I am digging a pit of clay
for a guest like...

He throws another skull.

Hamlet.
Another one! Could that be a lawyer's skull?
Where is his jargon now?
Why does he allow this idiot to knock him on the head
with a dirty spade instead of suing him
for assault and battery?
He might have been a wealthy landowner too.
Now his skull in rolling on a piece of land
that represents a tiny little part of his former property.
What he will soon own is a coffin and the earth over it.

Horatio.
No more than that, indeed.

Hamlet.
Are property deeds written on sheepskin?

Horatio.
Yes, Sir, and on calfskin too.

Hamlet.
People who trust property deeds

are nothing but sheep and calves.
I am going to talk to this man…
Excuse me, sir, whose grave is this?

First Clown.
Mine, Sir.

He sings.
I am digging a pit of clay
for a guest like...

Hamlet.
I think it must be yours, for you are lying in it.

First Clown.
And you are lying outside of it; thus it's not yours.
As for me, I'm not lying to you: it's really mine.

Hamlet.
When you say that it is yours, you lie,
for it is for the dead, not for the living.

First Clown.
It is a lively lie, Sir: it is jumping again from me to you.

Hamlet.
For what man are you digging it?

First Clown.
For no man, Sir.

Hamlet.
What woman, then?

First Clown.
For no woman, Sir.

Hamlet.
Who will be buried in it?

First Clown.
A person who used to be a *she* but is an *it* now
since *it* is a corpse.

Hamlet.
This man must be a persnickety grammarian.
If we don't speak accurately, he will deceive us by
making puns. Horatio, I have noticed that peasants
have become so witty that they are
snapping at the courtiers' heels...
How long have you been a gravedigger?

First Clown.
I started the day when the late King Hamlet
defeated Fortinbras.

Hamlet.
How long ago was that?

First Clown.
You don't remember the date! Any idiot could tell you
that it was the day when the young Hamlet was born.
You know him; it's the crazy boy
who was sent to England.

Hamlet.
Why was he sent to England?

First Clown.
Because he was crazy. He will recover his sanity there.
If he doesn't, in that country,
he will melt into the background

Hamlet.
Why?

First Clown.
Because nobody will notice he is crazy,
for the English are as crazy as he.

Hamlet.
How did he go crazy?

First Clown.
In a strange way.

Hamlet.
What do you mean?

First Clown.
He lost his mind?

Hamlet.
Where?

First Clown.
Here, in Denmark...
I have been the sexton of this church for thirty years.

Hamlet.
How long will a man stay in the earth
before he begins to rot?

First Clown.
You see, nowadays, many people are so rotten that they
fall to pieces even before you put them in a coffin.
However, if he is not rotten before he dies, he will
last you eight or nine years.
A tanner will last you nine years.

Hamlet.
Why will he last longer?

First Clown.
Because his skin is so thick that it prevents the moisture
from penetrating his body for a long time, and water
is what makes corpses rot. Here is a skull
that has been here for twenty-three years.

Hamlet.
Whose was it?

First Clown.
It was a raving lunatic's skull.
To whom do you think it belonged?

Hamlet.
I don't know.

First Clown.
Once, this idiot poured a bottle
of white wine on my head.
This is the skull of Yorick, the king's jester.

Hamlet.
This one?

First Clown.
Yes, this one.

Hamlet.
Let me see. *[he grasps the skull.]*
Poor Yorick! … I knew him, Horatio;
he was a very funny man and an imaginative clown.
He carried me on his back a thousand times,
and now, he is just a… skull! It makes me sick!
I don't know how many times
I kissed the lips that were right here.
Where are your jokes, your capers, your songs, the
witticisms that aimed to make the tablemates laugh?

You don't make anybody laugh now; are you upset?
Go to my girlfriend's bedroom and make her laugh:
tell her that her makeup will not
prevent her from rotting.
Horatio, tell me one thing.

Horatio.
What thing, Sir?

Hamlet.
Do you think that Alexander the Great looked like
this when he was buried?

Horatio.
Yes, he did.

Hamlet.
And smelled like that? Whew!

He puts down the skull.

Horatio.
Yes, he did, Sir.

Hamlet.
Man always falls from grace, Horatio.
Could the noble ashes of Alexander the Great
end up plugging a hole in a barrel?

Horatio.
What a strange idea!

Hamlet.
It's not that strange. Just follow the logic: Alexander died,
he was buried, he returned to dust, dust is earth,
earth turns into clay, we use clay to fill holes.
So why can't someone plug a beer barrel
using the dirt that once was Alexander?

Julius Caesar, dead and turned to clay,
might fill a hole
in order to keep the wind away.
The piece of clay that once ruled the world
became a cork!
Hush!

Priests, a coffin, Laertes, mourners,
the King, the Queen and courtiers enter.

Here come the king, the queen and the courtiers.
Who are they following?
They have modified the ceremony, which means that
the person in the coffin committed suicide.
It is a wealthy family.
Let's stay and watch for a while.

Hamlet and Horatio step aside.

Laertes.
What will you do next?

Hamlet.
That's Laertes, a young gentleman.
Listen to what he is saying.

Laertes.
What will you do next?

First Priest.
I am not allowed to perform other rites.
The cause of her death remains unclear. If the King had
not ordered us to bury her here, she would have been
buried outside the churchyard. We should throw stones
at her coffin instead of praying, tolling the bells and
covering he coffin with white lilies.

Laertes.
Is that all you can do?

First Priest.
Yes, that's all we can do.
We would spoil the funeral liturgy if we sang her the
requiem we sang to the righteous departed.

Laertes.
Lay her in the earth; let violets bloom
from her lovely virginal flesh!
You churlish priest, I state that my sister
will be an angel in Heaven while
you are howling with pain in Hell.

Hamlet *to Horatio*.
What, Ophelia?

Queen.
Flowers in order to bid the beautiful maiden farewell.

She scatters flowers.

I hoped you would become Hamlet's wife.
I thought I would scatter petals on your wedding bed,
sweet maiden, not on your grave.

Laertes.
Woe betide the evil man whose wicked deed
deprived you of your sanity.
Hold on a moment; I want to embrace her
for the last time.

He jumps into the grave.

Now heap the earth onto the living and the dead
until you have made a mountain higher than
Mount Pelion or Mount Olympus.

Hamlet, *advancing.*

Who is the man whose grief thunders,
whose sorrowful words stop the planets?
It is I: Hamlet the Dane.

He jumps into the grave.

Laertes.
May the Devil take your soul!

Hamlet has a fight with Laertes.

Hamlet.
You don't pray well. Take your hands off my throat.
Beware! I don't look angry,
but I have something dangerous in me.
Take your hands off.

King.
Separate them.

Queen.
Hamlet! Hamlet!

All.
Gentlemen...

Horatio *to Hamlet*.
Please, Sir, calm down.

The attendants separate them; they come out of the grave.

Hamlet.
I will fight against this issue until I die.

Queen.
What is the issue?

Hamlet.
I loved Ophelia. Forty thousand brothers
could not love her more than I.
What are you going to do for her?

King.
Oh, he is mad, Laertes.

Queen.
Hold on a moment, please.

Hamlet.
Show me what you are going to do for her.
Will you cry, fight, stop eating, self-harm, drink vinegar, or
eat a crocodile? I will do that.
Did you come here to whine,
to outface me, or to be buried alive with her?
It is I who will be buried with her!
If you complain to the mountains, they
will bury us under tones of earth
that will make Mount Ossa look like a wart.
You see, I can rant and rave.

Queen.
This is sheer madness.
He will be like this for a while;
then he will be as good as gold.

Hamlet.
Why do you treat me like this?
I have always loved you, but it doesn't matter.
Someday Hercules will triumph.

He exits.

King.
Please, Horatio, go with him.

Horatio exits.

To Laertes.
Be patient; I will take care of this problem soon.

To the Queen.
Tell the guards to keep an eye on your son.
This grave will soon accommodate another occupant.
In the meantime, let's proceed patiently.

They exit.

Scene II.

A hall in the castle. Hamlet and Horatio enter.

Hamlet.
That's enough. I want to tell you what really happened.
Do you remember the circumstances?

Horatio.
Yes, I do, Sir.

Hamlet.
There was a kind of war in my heart
that did not let me sleep.
It was worse than being a captive in chains.
When our methodical plans fail,
our instincts can enable us to succeed,
which means that there is a God in heaven
who always guides us.

Horatio.
That is true.

Hamlet.
So I put on my dressing gown, left my cabin, groped my
way through the darkness, find what I was looking for
and returned to my cabin.
I was bold enough to open the document
containing the King's instructions.
The letter asked the king of England to cut my head off!

Horatio.
Are you sure?

Hamlet; *he shows him a letter.*
Here is the document. You will read it later.
Do you want to hear of what I did?

Horatio.
Yes, of course.

Hamlet.
Overwhelmed by villainy,
I sat down and wrote a new letter with new instructions.
Like our politicians, I used to think that having nice
handwriting was useful for servants,
but I overcame that prejudice and gave birth
to an administrative chef-d'oeuvre.
Do you want to know what I wrote?

Horatio.
Yes, Sir.

Hamlet.
I wrote: 'England is not only a faithful colony
but also a faithful friend.
Peace must bring our nations together.
Consequently, you must put the man who
delivered this letter to death right away,
for he is a dangerous troublemaker.'

Horatio.
How did you seal it?

Hamlet.
Heaven helped me: I had my father's signet ring in my
pocket, the one with the royal seal of Denmark on it.
I folded the paper, signed it, sealed it and put it back
into the envelope without leaving any trace.
On the following day, the pirates pursued us;
you know what happened next.

Horatio.
Were Guildenstern and Rosencrantz traitors?

Hamlet.
Well, they were willing to help my uncle. I don't feel guilty
about them, for they got what they deserved.
It's always a dangerous situation when persons
of modest means are caught in
the crossfire between mighty opponents.

Horatio.
Claudius is a strange king.

Hamlet.
Don't you think it is now the duty of a righteous man
to kill him with this sword?
He killed my father, disgraced my mother,
stole my throne and tried to kill me.
We cannot let this monster live,
for he will harm many more people.

Horatio.
He will find out soon what happened in England.

Hamlet.
Soon enough, but time is on my side: a man's life is short.

As for Laertes, I feel sorry for him.
I flew into a rage because of his outrageous behaviour.
However, his situation resembles mine.
I will apologize to him.

Horatio.
Hang on a minute… who are you?

Osric enters.

Osric.
Welcome back to Denmark, Sir.

Hamlet.
Thank you, sir.

Murmuring to Horatio.
Do you know this moth fly?

Horatio.
No, I don't, Sir.

Hamlet.
You're lucky, for he is most unpleasant.
He is a wealthy landowner: give an animal a lot of money,
and it will be invited to the King's table.

Osric.
I am sorry to bother you,
but I have a message from His Majesty.

Hamlet.
You don't bother me.
Please, put your hat back on your head.

Osric.
It is very hot today; I don't need it.

Hamlet.
Oh no, it's rather cold: the north wind is blowing.

Osric.
In fact, it's a bit chilly.

Hamlet.
It's too hot and humid for me.

Osric.
Hot and humid, indeed.
His Majesty asked me to tell you that
he has bet a lot of money on you.

Hamlet, *pointing to Osric's head.*
Please, put your hat back on your head.

Osric.
I feel fine, thank you. Sir, a man named Laertes
has recently come to the court.
He is an outstanding gentleman: the cream of the crop.

Hamlet.
He his a heavenly soul, indeed.
Nobody can surpass him.

Osric.
This is true.

Hamlet.
But what's the point, sir? Why are we talking
about him like this?

Osric.
Why?

Horatio, *murmuring to Hamlet.*
Can't you talk to him in a different way?

Hamlet.
Why are we talking about him?

Osric.
Who? Laertes?

Horatio, *murmuring to Hamlet*
He has run out of compliments.

Hamlet.
Yes, Laertes, sir.

Osric.
I know that you know...

Hamlet.
I knew that you knew that I knew. You were saying…?

Osric.
You know Laertes' qualities...

Hamlet.
I can't admit that, since you would have to compare
his qualities to mine. But to know a man well
is to know him more than a little.

Osric.
I was alluding to his skill level in fencing:
he is almost unbeatable.

Hamlet.
What king of weapon does he use?

Osric.
The rapier and the dagger.

Hamlet.
That's two of his weapons; but go on.

Osric.
The King has bet six Barb horses, and he has prepared six
French rapiers and daggers.
Three of the carriages are very fancy.

Hamlet.
What do you mean by ‘carriages’?

Horatio, *murmuring to Hamlet.*
I knew that you would need footnotes to understand him.

Osric.
The carriages, sir, are the sheaths.

Hamlet.
Carriage sounds like a vehicle that carries cannons.
Sheath is the real name.
Six Barb horses, six French swords with accessories and
three fancy carriages: that sounds like a French bet
against a Dane. Why has all this been put on the table?

Osric.
The King, Sir, has bet that, in a dozen rounds
in which you will fight Laertes,
he won’t beat you by more than three hits.
If you gave me your answer now,
the duel could start immediately.

Hamlet.
What if my answer is no?

Osric.
Don’t you agree to play against Laertes, Sir?

Hamlet.
Sir, I'm going to exercise in the hall: it's time to do so.
If the King still wants to go through with it, you will have
to tell Laertes to come her with the swords.
I will try to make the King win his bet.
I have nothing to lose.

Osric.
Shall I tell this to the King?

Hamlet.
Yes, but don't be too bombastic.

Osric.
Your wish is my command.

Hamlet.
Thank you.

Osric exits.

He is flamboyant.

Horatio.
Yes, and a bit crazy.

Hamlet.
He used to bow to his mother's nipple before he sucked it.
There are many people like him today:
they keep repeating honeyed truisms.
If you blow a little on this bubble, it will burst.

A lord enters.

Lord.
Sir, Osric told the King that your agreed
to the fencing bout.
His Majesty wants to know if you want

to play against him
right away or later.

Hamlet.
I will comply with the King's wish.
If he's ready now, so am I.

Lord.
The King, the Queen and the courtiers are approaching.

Hamlet.
Right on time!

Lord.
The queen wants you to have a chat with Laertes
before you begin the bout.

Hamlet.
She is a wise woman.

The Lord exits.

Horatio.
You are going to lose this bet, Sir.

Hamlet.
I don't think so. I've been practicing since he departed for
France. Actually, I may win, but I am a bit worried.

Horatio.
You mustn't...

Hamlet.
I have a presentiment of...

Horatio.
If something is telling you not to play, listen to it.
I will tell them that you are indisposed.

Hamlet.
Don’t do that. I don’t care about superstitions because
God controls everything, even a sparrow’s death.
If something is supposed to happen now, it will. If it is
supposed to happen later, it won’t happen now. What is
important is to be prepared. Since nobody knows
anything about what he or she leaves behind,
why should I leave early?

The King, the Queen, Laertes, lords, Osric
and attendants carrying foils, a table
and pitchers of wine enter.

King.
Shake hands with Laertes, Hamlet.

The King puts Laertes' hand into Hamlet's.

Hamlet *to Laertes.*
I beg your pardon, sir. I’ve done you wrong, but you
know that I suffer from a mental disorder.
Hence, I wasn’t really myself.
The man who offended his beloved brother
was Hamlet’s archenemy: his madness!

Laertes.
I understand your motives,
but if my heart accepts you apology,
my stained honor compels you
to make amends for the crime
in a gentlemanly way.

Hamlet.
I will do so. Give us the swords.

Laertes.
Give me this sword.

Hamlet.
I'm so bad at fencing, Laertes,
that your skill will shine like the brightest star
in the darkest sky.

Laertes.
You're making fun of me, Sir.

Hamlet.
No, I am not.

King.
Give them the swords, Osric.
Hamlet, do you know the bet?

Hamlet.
Yes, Sire: you placed a bet on the weaker fencer.

King.
I'm not worried. I've seen both of you fence. Since Laertes
is better, I have given him a handicap.

Laertes.
This one is too heavy, let me see another one.

Hamlet.
I like this one. Are they all of the same length?

They are ready to fence.

Osric.
Yes, Sire.

King.
Set the pitchers of wine on that table.
If Hamlet hits him once or twice, or sidesteps in the third
round, fire the cannons. I will drink to Hamlet's health,

and I will drop a priceless jewel into his glass.
Give me the glasses. And now let the drum and the
trumpet tell the skies that the King
is drinking to Hamlet's health.
Come on, let's begin! Judges, watch carefully.

Hamlet.
Come on, sir.

Laertes.
Come on, Sir.

They start fighting.

Hamlet.
Touché.

Laertes.
No.

Hamlet.
Referee!

Osric.
It's a hit, indeed.

Laertes.
Well, let's go on.

King.
Give me a glass.
Hamlet, this jewel is yours.

He pours the poison into the glass.
The trumpets play; a cannon is fired.

Hand him the glass.

Hamlet.
Let me finish this round. Let's play.
Another hit; what do you say?

Laertes.
Touché, indeed.

King.
Our son will win.

Queen.
He is chubby and out of breath…
Hamlet, take my handkerchief and wipe your forehead.
The Queen drinks to your good luck.

She lifts the glass with the poison.

Hamlet.
Thank you, Madam.

King.
Gertrude, don't drink that.

Queen, *drinking.*
Too late!

King *to himself.*
That was the poisoned drink!

Hamlet.
I'd better not drink now. I will drink later.

Queen.
Hamlet, let me wipe your face.

Laertes.
My lord, I will hit him in the third round.

King.
I doubt it.

Laertes *to himself.*
But I almost feel guilty.

Hamlet.
Get ready for the third round, Laertes.
Give it your best shot; I think you are teasing me.

Laertes.
I am not.

They resume the bout.

Osric.
They are neck and neck.

Laertes.
Take this!

Laertes wounds Hamlet; then, in a scuffle, they change rapiers and Hamlet wounds Laertes.

King.
Separate them; they are crazy.

Hamlet.
No, let's continue.

The Queen falls.

Osric.
Look at the queen!

Horatio.
Both fencers are bleeding… how do you feel, Sir?

Osric.
How do you feel, Laertes?

Laertes.
Like an idiot caught in his own trap.
My dirty trick has killed me!

He falls.

Hamlet.
How is the Queen?

King.
She fainted when she saw them bleeding.

Queen.
No, no, the drink, the drink! Oh, my dear Hamlet! The drink, the drink! I've been poisoned.

She dies.

Hamlet.
Lock the door! We have been betrayed!
Catch the traitor!

Laertes falls; Osric exits.

Laertes.
Hamlet, I am the traitor.
You are going to die, for no medicine in the world can cure you. The treacherous weapon is right in your hand: the sword was dipped into poison.
The malicious act backfired on me. Here I lie and will never get up again. Your mother has been poisoned. I can't speak anymore. The King, the King is the instigator.

Hamlet.
The blade is poisoned too!

He stabs the King.

Osric and lords.
Treason! Treason!

King.
Protect me, my friends. I've only been hurt.

Hamlet.
Incestuous, murderous Dane,
drink this and rejoin my mother.

He forces the King to drink; the King dies.

Laertes.
He got what he deserved. It is he who poured
the poison into the glass.
Please, forgive me as I forgive you.
You're not responsible for my death and my father's;
I'm not responsible for yours.

He dies.

Hamlet.
God will forgive you. I will follow you… I'm dying,
Horatio…
Goodbye, Evil Queen…
And you, trembling, speechless spectators, I could tell you
a thing or two, but I am dying. Let it be so…
Horatio, you are alive:
tell everyone what really happened.

Horatio.
I won't do so. I'm more like an ancient Roman than a
modern Dane. There is poisoned wine in this glass.

He picks up the glass.

Hamlet.
Please, give me that wine. I will drink it.
I don't want to leave such a tarnished reputation
behind me. You must live to tell my story.

A military march is heard from offstage; a cannon fires

What are these warlike noises?

Osric.
Young Fortinbras, who conquered a part of Poland, is
firing his guns to greet the English ambassadors.

Hamlet.
Oh, I'm dying, Horatio! The poison is dissolving my mind.
I will not live to hear the news from England,
but I feel certain that the victorious prince
will become the king of Denmark.
My dying voice can only utter:
God save the King...

He dies.

Horatio.
A noble heart is expiring. Good night, sweet prince.
The angels will lull you to sleep.
Why are those drums approaching?

Fortinbras, the English Ambassadors,
a drummer and attendants enter.

Fortinbras.
What do I see?

Horatio.
What would you like to see?
This is a tragedy.

Fortinbras.
This is a mess!
Why so many princes were killed at the same time?

First Ambassador.
What a horrible sight!
The news from England arrives too late: the persons
who should have heard it are dead.
I had to tell the King that his orders had been carried out
and that Rosencrantz and Guildenstern were dead.
Who will thank me now?

Horatio.
Not the king, even if he were still alive.
He never ordered their deaths, but since you are here,
let me tell you why this bloodbath happened.

Fortinbras.
Let's hear about it.
I am asking the noblemen to listen to you carefully.
As for me, even though I feel sad,
I take the opportunity to proclaim that I should
become the king of this country.

Horatio.
That's a good idea, all the more so because
Hamlet asked me to tell you the truth,
which will prevent us from making more mistakes.

Fortinbras.
Let four officers carry Hamlet like a soldier
onto the stage.
He would have been a great king if he had lived.
Let the military music and rites praise him.
Pick up the corpses: a sight like this suits
a battlefield, not the residence of a king.
Go outside and tell the soldiers to fire the cannons.

They exit, marching and carrying the corpses.
The cannons are fired.